



HEIRESS OF GLEN GOWER

MAY AGNES FLEMING





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THE HEIRESS OF GLEN GOWER;

OR,

THE HIDDEN CRIME.

BY

MAY AGNES FLEMING.

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THE HEIRESS OF GLEN GOWER.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND MORNING.

Two young men, Harding and Hollis, were jolting along at midnight, in a lumbering stage-coach, through one of the dreariest regions of New Jersey. The forest road was unutterably dismal and forsaken, the night black, sultry, moonless, starless. A low-lying black sky shut down over the tree-tops like a pall, and the September gale shrieked and sighed through the forest with the roar of the angry sea.

Mr. Harding dropped off asleep; midnight and darkness and coming tempest had no effect upon him. Mr. Hollis, of a more mercurial temperament, let down the window and hailed the driver.

"Halloo, there! Driver ahoy! What time do we reach Lyme-ford?"

"About four in the morning, sir."

"And what time does the first train start for Jersey City?"

"Half after five, sir."

"Any stopping-places between here and there? Any more passengers coming? Because, if there's not, I'm going to make myself comfortable for the night."

"Two more a-coming, sir—places engaged yes'day. I'll take 'em up in about half an hour. You go to sleep, sir; they won't disturb you."

Mr. Hollis shut down the window and tried to follow the Jehu's advice; but the lumbering stage-coach bumped and jolted and pitched and tossed like a ship in a raging ocean, and the effort was in vain. The shrieking wind sounded in his ears like the voices of midnight demons, and when he

strove to look out the very blackness of darkness shrouded heaven and earth.

"Beastly roads!" growled Mr. Hollis; "and of all the infernal contrivances made for the misery of man, stage-coaches top the pile! We may be riding in the lower regions in this Tartarean blackness for all— Halloo! our new passengers at last!"

For the stage-coach had stopped in the very heart of the wild forest path. Neither town nor village was near, but a glimmering ray of light in the blackness showed an isolated log cabin buried in the deepest depth of the primeval forest.

Hollis lowered the window again. That fitful ray of light streamed red and lurid, piercing the blackness like a fiery lance. By that one red ray he saw two figures—the figures of a man and a woman—standing under the tossing trees. The collar of the man's long, loose overcoat was so turned up, and the brim of his broad felt hat so slouched down, that he was entirely shrouded. The woman was draped in black from head to foot, and completely hidden by a long black veil.

"Mysterious," murmured Mr. Hollis, "and melodramatic in the extreme! Midnight—a hut in the woods—a disguised man—a veiled lady! Is she young and pretty, I wonder, and is it a runaway match?"

They were entering as he asked himself the question. He heard the man's voice as they did so. The lady, holding her black veil close over her face, as though dreading, even in the darkness, that the wind might blow it aside, made a false step and stumbled. The man caught her hastily.

"Take care, Adelia," he said, impatiently; "don't be awkward!"

"Oh, she's his wife!" reflected Hollis. "He never would snap at her like that if she wasn't his wife. Or, maybe, his sister. I don't see the need of that thick veil in this pitchy gloom; but then I don't pretend to understand these feminine mysteries."

They had taken their seats, and the stage-coach bumped and blundered on. The one dim lamp that lighted the primitive vehicle showed the lady with her head lying heavily against the hard leathern back of the coach.

The man sat beside her, and despite the turned-up coat collar and the turned-down hat brim, Hollis saw a handsome aquiline nose and a pair of gleaming black eyes.

"A dark night, sir," he said to the black, bright eyes, "and a lonesome road. I hope you're not addicted to seasickness, for this jolting Noah's ark is worse than a Dover

and Calais packet in a November gale. And I know, for I've tried both."

"Indeed?" very coldly.

"I have been thinking, as we stumbled along, that it is fortunate we don't live in Claude Duval's or Jack Sheppard's days. It is just the scene—yonder black woods—and just the hour for a brigandish attack."

"Ah!" with a slight sneer, "you are inclined to be fanciful, my friend."

There was an instant's pause after this rebuff, but Mr. Hollis was not of the easily vanquished.

"We'll have the storm sooner than I thought," he said, "to make matters worse. Here it is, hot and heavy, by George!"

The gale, that had paused for a moment as if to gather new strength, burst out again with a wild shriek that made the old coach rock and rattle. The rain fell in heavy, splashing drops for an instant, then in a vast, roaring sheet, as if the flood-gates of heaven had opened. The lightning leaped out like a two-edged sword, and the thunder crashed over their heads as if sky and earth were rending asunder.

"A tropic tornado, by Jove!" muttered Mr. Hollis, covering his blinded eyes. "We're going to have a night of it. I hope the lady is not afraid of lightning?"

"She is not in the least afraid!"

The manner in which these words were said left even the talkative Hollis no dignified alternative but to hold his tongue. Luckily, the uproar of thunder and wind and rain awoke his friend, who sat up, stunned and blinded.

"Have I been sleeping a century or two, Hollis, and have I awoke in another world? Is it the day of judgment?"

"Something very like it. Good Heaven! what perfectly awful lightning! I tell you, Harding, if this old rattle-trap doesn't tip over and break all our necks within the next hour, it is considerably stronger on its pins than I give it credit for."

The veiled lady uttered a low cry and laid hold of her companion's arm. He shook it off with a sudden motion.

"Don't be a fool, Adelia!" he said, in the sharp, impatient tone he had used before. "There is no danger. This gentleman likes to hear himself talk—that is all!"

"Is it all?" angrily muttered Hollis. "You'll see before morning. If it wasn't for the lady's sake, I would wish it might. I'd risk my own neck willingly for the sake of seeing yours broken, my civil friend."

But the old stage-coach had buffeted many a storm, and faced this one nobly. Still the rain fell, still the wind howled through the surging, rocking trees, still blazed the lightning, still crashed the thunder. The road, bad at its best, grew worse and worse. The tossing and jolting were something fearful.

The veiled lady clung to her companion in a speechless paroxysm of womanly terror. That midnight scene was a scene never to be forgotten. The raging tempest without; that quivering old stage-coach making its way along the desolate forest road, through darkness and danger and wildest storm.

“By Heaven!” cried Hollis, springing wildly to his feet, “the coach is going!”

He was right. Blinded by the blazing lightning, stumbling over the broken road, the horses fell with a crash. There was an awful sound of rending and tearing, and then the brave old stage-coach lay a shattered heap on the ground.

One cry alone had rung out, wild and agonized, as it went down.

“Gerald, Gerald, Gerald, save me!”

Then the triumphant tempest had the deafening uproar all to itself, and the lurid glare of the lightning lighted up the desolate forest road, the prostrate horses and men.

CHAPTER II.

BORN IN STORM AND MYSTERY.

AN instant after the overthrow the carriage door was wrenched violently open from within, and a man crawled out from the ruins. He stood on his feet and shook himself, to make sure he was not hurt. A blinding blaze of lightning showed the tall, graceful figure, the handsome, aquiline nose, and bright, dark eyes of the young man who had snubbed Mr. Hollis.

“No bones broken, thank fortune!” he muttered. “The gods that specially watch over fools and scapegraces must have had me in charge this time. Am I the only one left alive in this howling wilderness to tell the tale? No, by all that’s lucky, here’s another!”

It was the driver, who scrambled up with a very rueful visage and very sore bones.

“Misfortinit, sir, ain’t it?” said the driver. “Right here in the very heart of the woods, too, and in this awful storm!”

Ain't the other gents got out yet, sir? And the lady—you're the gent as come with the lady, ain't you?"

"Help! Halloo, there! help us out, confound you!" cried the stifled voice of Hollis. "Be quick, I say! I'm afraid the lady's killed!"

The driver uttered a cry and sprang forward.

For a second the young man stood, and the blue gleam of the lightning showed his pale face lighted up with a sudden flash of triumph.

"So!" he said, under his breath; "this friendly overthrow cuts the Gordian knot and puts an end to all my difficulties. By Jove, the storm has done me good service to-night!"

He came forward and energetically assisted the driver to drag out the prostrate forms from under the broken coach. Hollis had escaped with a few bruises, but Harding was severely injured, and with difficulty could stand. As for the lady, they drew her prostrate figure out at last—cold and lifeless, without sense or motion. It was her companion who received her rigid form in his arms.

"Is she dead?" Hollis asked, in an awe-struck whisper.

The lightning blazed out with the words, and for a second or two lighted up the desolate scene with its ghastly glare. The young man stood in their midst, holding the light, slender form in his arms. The veil had been torn off, and a young face whiter than marble lay against his breast. Then an awful crash of thunder shook heaven and earth, and pitch darkness and pouring rain wrapped them like a shroud.

"She is not dead," the young man replied, his voice sounding strangely cold and passionless. "She has fainted. But she will die, and we all stand a chance to follow if we linger here in this pitiless storm."

"What are we to do?" said Hollis. "We are in the very heart of the woodland. We must shelter the lady. But for ourselves—Harding, my poor fellow, what will become of you?"

"Hold on!" cried the driver. "We can do better than standing here in the thundering rain all night, or I miss my guess. Let's see a minute."

The friendly lightning blazed once more, and lighted up the black woods and dismal forest path for fully twenty seconds. Then thunder and darkness and a deluge of rain.

"I knew it!" said the driver. "Hooray! Larkins's ain't half a mile off. I've traveled this here road too often to be took in. Half a mile further on, this here path branches off into three cross-roads. At the junction of them three cross-

roads there's a house. That house is Larkins's, and Mrs. Larkins is a woman worth her weight in diamonds. We can stay there all night, and she'll fix up this young woman as right as a trivet afore morning."

"Are you sure?" asked Hollis, doubtfully.

"Am I sure my name is Bob Watson?" returned the stage-driver, contemptuously. "I know every turn of these yer woods, as you chaps know the twistings of your native towns. Don't stand there giving jaw, but help us rig up a shutter for the lady, and let's make off at once!"

He laid hold of the coach door as he spoke, to wrest it from its hinges. Hollis assisted him as well as he could for the blinding darkness and rushing rain. In ten minutes the rigid form of the young girl was laid upon it, wrapped in her cloak, and covered as well as they could cover her from the raging storm. The four men mounted it upon their shoulders and set off through the blackness and the tempest along the slippery, dangerous road. Almost incessant flashing of the lightning lighted up the ghastly path, the backwoods, and their own pale faces.

"Are we almost there, driver?" asked Harding, at length. "I feel as if I should drop, and my head is reeling like a drunken man's."

"'Most there," responded the driver, cheerily. "The next flash will show you the cross-roads."

The next flash came as he spoke. The men paused simultaneously to breathe. Yes, there were the three cross-roads, and yonder, beneath the trees, the dark outline of a log cabin.

"All right, my hearties!" Bob Watson cried, cheerily. "Five minutes more, and we'll be able to snap our fingers at the lightning and rain. On, with a will!"

They stumbled blindly forward in the direction of the house. No light was visible; hours and hours ago the inmates were sound asleep.

Bob Watson found the door, and thundered against it with both clinched fists. The knocking awoke sundry big dogs in the background, who set up a furious barking. The uproar might have awakened the dead.

"Halloo, within there!" yelled the driver. "Halloo! halloo! halloo!"

An upper window was cautiously raised an inch or two, and a woman's voice came down:

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"Halloo, Mrs. Larkins! I thought we'd rout you out. It's me—Bob Watson, the stage-driver. The coach upset in

the storm half a mile off, and here we are a passel of drowned rats. We've got a woman with us that's dead, or next door to it! So hurry and let us in, for the sake of the Lord above!"

"I'll be there in half a minute," replied the woman's voice, promptly; and the window shut sharply down and a light appeared behind the blind.

They waited in the rain and the darkness—the pitiless rain and the cruel darkness—drenched to the skin. The woman's half minute seemed very long, but the light came gleaming down-stairs at last, the bolts were withdrawn, and the friendly door held open.

"Come in," said the woman's voice. "May the good Lord pity any poor creatures out such a night as this!"

Behind the woman, who held aloft a flaming tallow candle, stood two stalwart young men and a strapping damsel, all full of pity and curiosity, and all in scanty drapery. The coach-wrecked voyagers came in, pitiable objects surely—dripping wet, more or less bruised, splashed with mud, and bearing a lifeless woman in their midst.

"Is she dead?" asked the woman, with a cry.

"Fainted," sententiously answered the young man, who came foremost. "If you will show me where your bedroom regions are, I will take her there at once."

He lifted her in his arms with the air of one having the right. The light of the flaming tallow candle fell full upon her face, and they all saw it was the face of a girl in her first youth, colorless as death, and marvelously beautiful.

"Light another candle, Jane Ann," said the woman, "and quick about it. Fetch these men into the kitchen, and stir up the fire, and set on the kettle to bile. You, sir, come this way."

She turned up the steep, rude stair-way, light in hand, and the young man followed with his burden. There were two rooms—rough, unplastered attic rooms—here, and into the one on the right the woman led the way.

"This is my bedroom and my daughter's, and the best we've got. Lay the young lady on the bed, sir, and take off that soaking cloak."

The young man hesitated an instant, then complied. As the cloak was removed, and the woman stooped over the motionless figure, she recoiled with a cry of surprise.

"I thought she was a child! Why, good Lor' a massy—" she stopped short, looking the young man full in the face. But he turned away, avoiding her keen gaze.

"I'll go down and join the rest now," he said. "When you restore her to consciousness let me know."

He turned on his heel and quitted the room as he spoke. The woman stood gazing on the beautiful, rigid face with a gaze of unutterable womanly pity.

"Poor young creeter!" she said. "So young and so pretty! Ought to be playing with her dolls for two years to come instead of— It's my opinion she'll never live to see morning."

Down-stairs the strapping damsel, otherwise Jane Ann, had rekindled the covered embers, and the friendly fire burned brightly. The kitchen was a long, low room, sparsely and poorly furnished, but the leaping fire made amends for all shortcomings. Around it the four men gathered, steaming in their wet garments until the kitchen was blind with vapor. The kettle already sung on the blaze, and one of the young farmers was dressing the contusions of Mr. Harding. Without the September storm still raged with unabated fury.

Hollis, Harding, the driver, and the farmers talked away sociably, forgetting their mishaps in the luxurious warmth and the promise of speedy breakfast. But the young man with the aquiline nose and black eyes sat moodily silent, staring steadfastly at the fire. He was very handsome, now that the disguising coat and cap were removed, with thick, clustering black hair curling over a white forehead, a thick black mustache, and hands white and shapely as a woman's. Very handsome, and buxom Jane Ann cast sidelong glances at him over her work; and yet something suspiciously like an angry scowl darkened that perfect beauty, and grew blacker every instant.

An hour had passed, breakfast was quite ready, and the men had risen to gather round the table, when Mrs. Larkins appeared in their midst. Her glance singled out the handsome owner of the dark eyes at once.

"Will you step this way, sir?" she said. "I want to ask you a question."

The young man followed her out into the passage. The log cabin comprised but the three rooms altogether. The woman held the candle in her hand, and now she raised it until its light fell full upon the darkly handsome face. Her resolute gray eyes were fixed upon him, as though she would read his inmost heart.

"That unfortunate young girl upstairs is your wife, sir, is she not?" she abruptly demanded.

The young man smiled—a most peculiar and inexplicable

smile. He had been smoking a cigar when the woman summoned him away, and he did not take the trouble to remove it from his lips.

"Has she told you so?" he asked.

"She has told me nothing. I don't think she will ever speak to any one again in this world, poor soul! I don't think she will ever live to see another sun rise and set. It was madness for her to attempt this journey at all."

The handsome face into which she looked as she spoke was moveless as a stone mask.

"Poor little girl!" he said; "but she would come. You will do all you can for her, my good Mrs. Larkins, and as far as money can reward you, you shall be rewarded. I suppose a doctor is a wild impossibility in this waste and howling wilderness."

"There is no doctor nearer than Lyme-ford, and all the doctors on earth can not conquer death."

"Very true; nevertheless, I must endeavor to reach Lyme-ford some time to-day, and send a physician from there. We must make an effort, you know."

"You have not answered my question, sir," the woman said, sharply. "Is she your wife?"

"My good soul, that is beside the question, isn't it? What does it matter to you whether she is my wife, or any one's wife, so that you are well paid?"

"It matters this, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Larkins, with flashing eyes, "that I'm an honest woman and the mother of a daughter, and that I don't keep open house for—"

The young man's white fingers covered her lips.

"Don't say it," he said—"don't! You would be sorry for it after, I assure you you would. Besides, what can you do? You can't turn her out into the storm to die. Take care of her while she lives—take care of her until she dies, if die she must. I repeat, you shall be amply rewarded. And now, if you will excuse me, I'll return to breakfast, for I shall really need that meal if I'm to travel to Lyme-ford in the storm."

He left her abruptly as he spoke, and the woman looked after him with angry eyes.

"He's got the face of an angel and the heart of a devil!" she said, indignantly. "It's the old story, I suppose—a pretty little innocent creature, a handsome scoundrel, a home deserted, and hearts broken. Ah! dear me, it's a wicked world! Poor little suffering soul! I'll do what I can for her—her blood will not be on my head."

She ascended to the chamber above, and the young man

went back to his breakfast. But he had very little appetite for that meal; he drank a cup of Jane Ann's tea, swallowed a mouthful of bread as though it had been a pill, and rose abruptly from the table.

"The storm is subsiding," he said; "driver, I'll ride with you to Lyme-ford."

"All right, sir; Tom and me's off for the horses. I'll mount one, you can have t'other. But you'd be a sight more comfortable waiting here."

The stage-driver and one of the young farmers set off for the scene of the disaster. Morning had broken, rainy and raw, but the storm had expended its fury; the lightning had ceased, and the rain fell softly. Hollis and his friend drew close to the fire and lighted their pipes, but the moody stranger stood solitary by the window, staring out at the dull dawn. Not once did he move; he stood there, a tall, dark ghost, until the return of the two men with the horses. Then, without one word of farewell, he donned hat and coat, left the house, mounted one of the jaded steeds, and rode away.

"It's like the Marble Guest in 'Don Giovanni,'" said Hollis, with a shrug. "His anxiety about that pretty little thing upstairs won't wear him into the grave. I suppose he's gone for a doctor."

Yes, he had gone for a doctor. Five hours after, when Bob Watson clattered up to the house with fresh horses and vehicle, a young man in spectacles sprung out and announced himself as Doctor Phelps. Mrs. Larkins met him, and ushered him upstairs at once.

"Where's he—the young gentleman?" she asked.

"Waiting at Lyme-ford. But he's fee'd me handsomely, Mrs. Larkins, and he sent you this to reward you, and bury her if she dies—to reward you and provide for all present necessities if she lives."

He showed her a roll of notes—one hundred dollars in all.

"Who is he?" Mrs. Larkins asked.

"Never set eyes on him before—don't know him from Adam."

"And he didn't tell you his name, nor hers?"

"Not he, although I asked him. He told me my business was to bring her round if I could, and not to ask unnecessary questions. He's to wait at Lyme-ford until I return, and hear the result."

Yes, the young man was waiting at Lyme-ford—waiting in a fever of impatience that kept him pacing up and down his hotel room like a caged tiger.

"Will she live—will she die?" So rang the one constant refrain. "Am I to be free, or are two lives to drag me down instead of one? Oh, fool, fool, fool that I have been! to risk all for love of a pretty face, and think the world well lost!"

The dismal day wore on, the more dismal evening settled down over the dull little country town. Just as the dusk deepened into darkness, Dr. Phelps's gig rattled up to the hotel, and the doctor, wet and tired, strode into the little parlor.

The two men stood face to face in the gloom, but out of that gloom one face shone white as marble.

"Well," he asked, in a breathless whisper, "is it life or is it death?"

"It is death!"

Slowly and solemnly that answer came. The young man staggered back a pace and put his hand before his face.

"The child may live—she will die."

"The child—girl or boy?"

"A girl. The mother will hardly see morning."

"You may go," said the young man, hoarsely. "I wish to be alone."

The doctor left. The gig had hardly rolled out of sight in the darkness when the parlor bell rang.

"Is there a train for Jersey City to-night?" the voice spoke out of the darkness.

"Yes, sir; in half an hour the cars pass through Lyme-ford."

"I must catch that train. Order a conveyance at once to take me to the station."

Half an hour later the handsome young man with the aquiline nose and dark, bright eyes was leaving dreary Lyme-ford far behind him, and leaving no clew to the mystery that enshrouded him. Who he was, where he came from, what that dying girl was or had been to him, were among the impenetrable secrets locked in his own dark soul.

And far away in that wretched log hut in the woods, while the dark and rainy night shut down, that forsaken young girl lay, watched over by strangers, whiter and colder than winter's snow. And in good Mrs. Larkins's lap slumbered the new-born baby, as unconscious of the strangely checkered life before it as the nurse was of the dark mystery that wrapped its dying mother.

CHAPTER III.

SHOT DEAD!

THE October afternoon was slowly darkening into a chill and windy night. It was very near the close of the month, and there was an icy breath of winter in the shrill gale sighing through the woods and over the sandy Jersey plains. It was late in October, and the yellow leaves whirled away in melancholy drifts, and black, jagged clouds, prescient of coming storm, sailed slowly up the low-lying sky.

Mrs. Larkins's best bedroom, bare and forlorn enough at its best, looked doubly bare and forlorn in the gray light of this bleak October afternoon. Down-stairs the fire burned brightly, and buxom Jane Ann sung blithely over her work; but there where Mrs. Larkins's patient sat, with her baby on her knee, looking blankly out at the dying day, the view within and without was desolation itself.

The young girl—she could not have been quite eighteen—sat quite alone, her hands folded, her great dark eyes looking straight before her with a look of heavy, hopeless despair. A strange face for that log hut in the woods—a beautiful, high-bred face, with somber, fathomless eyes, and heavy waves of rich black hair.

For, despite Dr. Phelps, despite Mrs. Larkins, despite the opinion of all who saw her, the dying girl left to her fate in the lone house in the forest had not died. Very slowly—so slowly that for days and weeks the fluttering spirit hovered in the Valley of the Shadow—but surely, life won the victory. The large dark eyes opened, with life and reason burning dimly in their depths, and a faint voice asked for “Gerald,” “Eleanor,” “papa,” and then sleep took her, and life beat more strongly than ever when she awoke.

September passed, October came, and, pale as a spirit, she rose from that sick-bed. But the mystery that had wrapped her from the first was the same impenetrable mystery now. Good Mrs. Larkins's burning curiosity burned as hopelessly as ever still.

After those first feebly murmured names, she had asked no questions for more than a week. Then one night, as Mrs. Larkins sat alone by her bedside, the dark eyes turned full upon her, and the low voice asked a question:

“Where is Gerald?”

"The young man who left you here? Oh, he's gone long ago."

"Gone!"

"Yes, and good riddance; for if ever there was a heartless scoundrel on the face of the earth, he's that scoundrel! He left you here dying, as he thought, and much he cared!"

The white face never changed—the dark eyes never left the grim countenance of the nurse.

"Where am I? Who are you? How do I come to be here?"

Mrs. Larkins briefly related the mishap to the stage-coach, and what had followed.

"And I never thought to sit and talk to you like this, for of all the miracles ever I heard of, your life being spared is the greatest. Tell me, my dear, are you that bad man's wife?"

The white face darkened suddenly—darkened with such deadly hatred that good Mrs. Larkins recoiled.

"There! there!" she exclaimed; "for the Lord's sake, don't look like that! I won't ask any more questions. Look at the baby—pretty little sleeping pet!"

She held it up, but the young mother put out one wasted hand and thrust it away with a gesture of fierce repulsion.

"Take it out of my sight!" she cried. "I hate the sight of it! Viper and spawn of a viper! I would strangle it if I dared!"

"The Lord forgive you, you wicked mother!" Mrs. Larkins said, unutterably shocked. "You are as bad at heart as that bad man."

The young girl sat suddenly upright in bed, and stared Mrs. Larkins full in the face with blazing black eyes.

"Bad? Yes, there is a demon incarnate in my heart when I think of that villain and my wrongs! I loved him—I left all for him—and this is my reward! But let him beware, for, by the Heaven above me, I'll have such vengeance upon him as woman never had on man before!"

She fell back on her pillow, turned her face to the wall, and from that moment fell into a sullen silence nothing ever induced her to break.

This bleak October evening she had taken her child in her arms for the first time. It was the tiniest mite of babyhood, with two solemn black eyes and a waxen-white face—a pretty baby, with regular features and dead-black hair. There was little love in the young mother's face as she gazed on the tiny, helpless mite. Mrs. Larkins, entering suddenly, stood gazing in some alarm.

"There is no need of your wearing that frightened face, Mrs. Larkins," the girl said, with a bitter smile. "I have little reason to love it, but I won't kill it. It is like him—don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Larkins, "it is like him."

"And will grow up to be like him in heart as well as in face, no doubt. Mrs. Larkins, in all this wide earth there is no such villain as that man. I loved him once—oh, my God, so passionately, so madly! But I hate him now! I hate him! I hate him! I hate him!"

"Hush, for pity's sake! Don't think of him! Don't speak of him! It frightens me to hear you! Talk of baby instead. Do you know it is time she was baptized? Tell me what you want her called."

The young mother's answer was to snatch the baby off her lap and fling it roughly into that of her companion.

"What do I care? Call her what you please! What is it to me? Call her Maldetta. It is a fitting name. Maldetta, the Accursed!"

The white hands clinched, the dark eyes blazed, the teeth locked together convulsively. Mrs. Larkins got up in silent despair and left the room.

She sat by the window while the chill evening darkened down, her face rigid as marble, her eyes staring blankly into the darkness. But when the family had retired to rest and all was still, she rose, took down her cloak and bonnet from the peg where they hung, and noiselessly stole out of the house. The October moon had risen, and by its light she waited for the stage to Lymeford to pass. Without one word to tell whither she was going or when she would return, she turned her back upon her child and disappeared, with the impenetrable mystery of her life and her name the same impenetrable mystery still.

* * * * *

It was Marion Goldham's wedding-night. Marion Goldham, heiress, beauty and belle, was to-night to bless for life one of her innumerable adorers. All Fifth Avenue was on the *qui vive*, for it is not every day that the heiress of fabulous wealth, the possessor of fabulous beauty, rejects a dozen millionaires for the handsome face and romantic devotion of a penniless artist. Yes, it was a love-match, pure and simple, and beautiful Marion, in the midst of her dear five hundred friends, becomes to-night Mrs. Gerald Rosslyn.

Look at her as she stands in her dressing-room, in the midst of a bevy of sparkling bride-maids—a dazzling vision surely.

The exquisite, drooping face, the tall, willowy figure in billows of translucent silk and lace, frosted with seed pearls. That magnificent Parisian veil of priceless lace drapes her like palpable mist from head to foot, and the perfect arms and neck gleam through its silvery glitter like marble. A bright glory of amber hair crowns that radiant face, and from her veiled head to her sandaled foot the silver, shining vision is complete.

"How exquisite! how radiant!" is the universal cry. "Oh, Marion! You never looked half so lovely as you do to-night!"

The magnificent mansion is all ablaze. The long drawing-room on the first floor is one brilliant vista of splendor with alabaster lamps, and hot-house flowers, and superbly dressed ladies a-glitter with diamonds. And everything is ready, and the clergyman is waiting, and the bridegroom has arrived, and the guests are in breathless expectation, and the bride's heart is fluttering like a frightened bird—but not with fear. Oh, no! Words are poor and weak to tell how passionately she worships her handsome lover—how unutterably blessed she is to-night.

Outside the December wind wails and the fluttering snow falls. There is no moon, no stars in the black night sky, and the trees around the stately mansion rattle their gaunt arms like dead bones, and the fluttering figure that creeps stealthily in and cowers under those lighted windows may well wear that ghastly, death-white face. The window under which that shrouded, creeping figure crouches is wide open, for the thronged drawing-room is oppressively warm, and the blazing eyes in that livid face can see all that goes on within.

The bride comes out of her "maiden bower" with her bevy of snow-white nymphs, and Gerald Rosslyn, with the face of a Greek god, radiant with triumph and happiness, draws the fairy hand within his arm.

"My life! my love! my darling!" he whispers, passionately. "My own forever! My beautiful bride! Oh, Marion! I am the happiest man in all the wide earth to-night!"

She does not speak. The blue eyes lift with one eloquent glance, then flutter down, for there are joys on earth too intense for words or smiles.

They enter the drawing-room—they stand before the clergyman. There is a murmur and a flutter of irrepressible admiration throughout the high-bred assembly, for surely man and woman more perfectly beautiful never yet stood before Christian minister to be made husband and wife. Outside a

cowering figure springs erect, and the eyes in the darkness blaze like the eyes of a tiger.

The ceremony begins—it ends. The ring slips over the slender finger, and Marion Goldham is Marion Rosslyn for life. The radiant bridegroom bends down to kiss the lovely blushing face, and at that instant the sharp report of a pistol rings through the room. Without word or cry the bridegroom goes crashing down headlong, and the bride's white dress is splashed with blood.

There are wild shrieks—women run frantically about—men stand paralyzed. For a moment every one is so stunned that nothing is done—nothing is said. Then some one lifts up the prostrate man, looks in his face an instant, and speaks.

“Shot dead!” he says. “The bullet went straight through his brain.”

But the speaker was mistaken—Gerald Rosslyn was not dead. Better for him if the bullet had done its work and left him lifeless upon the floor, rather than he should have lived to persecute the woman who had fallen a victim to his wiles.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS STONE.

THE August day, blazing hot, is closing slowly, blazing hot still. The brassy August sun, that has rolled like a wheel of fire through a dazzling sky, is setting in a lurid glory of crimson and copper-colored clouds. Not a breath of air stirs the lifeless trees, no cooling dew moistens the parched and burned grass, and the western windows of Squire Ryder's handsome villa are flecked with scarlet splashes that gleam like blood. Within and without the house all is still—no one moves—the very dogs are too lazy to bark, and away yonder, in the hazy distance, the village lies mute and noiseless—a painted village under painted trees.

The lurid glory of the sunset is at its brightest when the house door opens and a young lady walks out—a young lady of not more than six-and-twenty, perhaps, but with a face out of which all the brightness of youth has gone. A handsome face, darkly beautiful once, darkly beautiful still, but for that fixed and changeless pallor that leaves it cold and rigid as marble.

The young lady walks slowly down the winding drive, with the red blaze of the lurid sunset gleaming through her dead-black hair, and flashing duskily in her somber black eyes.

She is tall and slender, and stately as a young queen, and her black dress falls around her with a certain classic grace. She is all in black, lighted up at the white throat with a knot of scarlet ribbon, and with one blood-red flower shining like a star in her dead-black hair. All crimson and black, with those great dusky eyes, that queenly grace and royal beauty, she looks like some creole princess dethroned and uncrowned; but she is only Squire Ryder's nursery governess, drudging out her dreary life for a pitiful stipend.

As she goes down the winding drive she passes a window where Mrs. Squire Ryder sits fanning herself languidly and talking to a female friend. Two pairs of eyes follow that stately figure and slow, graceful walk.

"What a very handsome person Miss Stone is!" the friend remarks—"a thorough lady in look and manner. She sweeps across a room with the air of a royal duchess, and her black eyes go through one like two flashes of lightning. I think she is a person who has seen better days."

"I think she's no better than she ought to be," said Mrs. Ryder, sitting up suddenly, with very unwonted animation. "I hate her! There!"

"My dear Mrs. Ryder!"

"I tell you I do, and I wouldn't keep her an hour in the house if it wasn't for Mr. Ryder. Where there's mystery and secrecy there's guilt, and Miss Stone's antecedents, from the hour she entered this house, are profoundest secrets. We don't know where she came from, or where she belongs, or who are her friends, or what she was before she came here. She might have dropped from the moon for all we know, or are likely to know, to the contrary. And you can't ask her any questions. I declare, it's ridiculous, but I could no more venture to cross-question that young woman than I could walk into the jaws of a hungry wolf. There's a look in that still, white face of hers, and in those big, dismal black eyes that—Oh, I detest her!" cried Mrs. Ryder, vehemently, "and I'd turn her out-of-doors to-morrow if I dared!"

"Dear me! And how long has she been a member of your family?"

"About six months, I suppose. It seems like six years, though, for I've never dared to call my soul my own since she came among us."

"I wonder you ever engaged her, disliking her so much."

"I tell you it was Mr. Ryder! Men are so absurd, and are sure to be caught by handsome female impostors. She came here as seamstress first, recommended by Mrs. Chillingworth.

and really she does embroider exquisitely. My husband took an interest in her from the beginning—she looks so remarkably unlike most young persons of her class—and when her engagement was about concluded he asked her to stay as governess to the children. She is surprisingly accomplished, plays well, sings well, speaks French, and draws beautifully. Now, that is in itself suspicious—young ladies possessing these accomplishments don't often find it necessary to go out as seamstresses. And no one need take a second look at her face to see that her history has been no ordinary one. There is something wrong and suspicious about her, and I am afraid of her, and I don't think she is a fit instructress for innocent children, and I wish to mercy she was safely out of the house."

"Does she know you dislike her?"

"Oh, it is impossible to tell. The face of that marble Flora there is not more stony and expressionless than hers. She might be the Man in the Iron Mask for all that set, white face of hers says to the contrary."

The object of all this animadversion had quite disappeared from view. She had followed the long drive and entered a leafy arcade, where the birds twittered in the green branches, and the red glory of the summer sunset came in fiery lances through the boles of the tall trees. Against one of those trees she leaned, and the somber dark eyes fixed themselves gloomily on all that gorgeous coloring of sky and land.

"My birthday," she said in a hushed voice to herself—"twenty-six years old to-day. Only six-and-twenty, and all that makes life worth the living gone years and years ago! Only six-and-twenty, and steeped to the lips in crime and misery and despair! Only six-and-twenty, and, oh! great God! what a lost, miserable, guilty wretch I am!"

She wrung her hands together, and her face worked convulsively. The black eyes fixed on the sunset saw nothing but her own black despair.

"If I only dared die! If I only dared swallow the contents of that bottle of laudanum in my trunk upstairs and end it all—the poverty, the wretchedness, the maddening remorse! But I dare not—I dare not! Life is full of horrors, but death is a thousand times more horrible still!"

She shivered as she thought the last dreadful thought, even in the hot August air.

"Ten years ago," she went on, in that dark communion with her own heart, "and youth and beauty and hope and love were all mine. In all the wide world I don't think there was one happier being than Adelia Lyon. And I loved him!"

Oh, my heart! so dearly—so dearly! And I trusted him, and I gave up home and honor and Heaven and my own soul for the madness of that mad love! What was my reward? One short year of bliss indescribable, and then the dream was at an end. A second year came, of coldness and reproaches and neglect, and then I was deserted to die among strangers—I and his child! And he wooed a rich and beautiful bride, and I was forgotten, as others had been forgotten before. But you paid the penalty, Gerald Rosslyn—your life paid for my broken heart. His life! Bah! could a whole hecatomb of such dastardly lives as his pay for a ruined home, a lost soul, a despairing brain, a broken, bleeding heart?"

Her face darkened—darkened with such passionate scorn, such demoniac hate, that Mrs. Squire Ryder, had she seen her at the moment, might well have felt herself justified in ordering her out of the house there and then.

"It is like a dream—the rest," she thought, leaning her arms across a bough of the tree and dropping her forehead on her arm—"the flight, the falling ill in that miserable tenement house, the hospital where I awoke from my long fever, and the wretched, wretched life I have dragged on since. Servant, seamstress, drudge—what have I not been? I, whose beauty might have made me the wife of a millionaire. And here I am despised and distrusted and disliked—I see it in that odious woman's face every hour of the day. My curse upon Gerald Rosslyn—my curse upon him dead in his grave, for all the life-long misery he has brought upon me!"

She started up, striking the tree passionately, as if it were the dead body of the man she hated. The beautiful face, with the glory of the sunset upon it, was as the face of a demon.

A heavy step came along the graveled path, a man's whistle came cheerily on the still air. Another moment and Squire Ryder entered the woodland path, his hands in his pockets, and was face to face with his governess. Miss Stone stood looking at the gorgeous western sky with a countenance of infinite calm.

"All alone, Miss Stone?" the squire said, cheerily; "doing the sentimental, and seeing the sun go down? Hot, isn't it? I'm in search of a breath of air, and I can't find it. Don't disturb yourself on my account; I'm going to the orchard to smoke. Here's to-day's 'Herald'—perhaps you'd like to read the marriages and deaths."

He handed her the paper with a good-humored nod, resumed his whistle, and sauntered on.

The marriages or deaths, or any other items the "Herald" might contain were of very little interest to the moody governess. She opened the paper mechanically and glanced over it with an indifferent eye. But it was all flat and uninteresting, and she was about folding it up wearily when something caught her eye that made her start as though she had been shot. It was a paragraph among the "Personals," and it ran thus:

"ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.—The above sum will be paid to any person giving information of the whereabouts of Eleanor Lauriston, maiden name Eleanor Lyon, nine years ago a resident of Brookfield, Penn. The same reward will be paid to any person giving authentic information of her death. Address William Gilmer, Barrister at Law, No. — Fulton Street, New York."

Miss Stone, the rigid governess, read this advertisement again and again and again. Her whole face lighted, her wan cheeks flushed, her black eyes glowed; she looked ten years younger in one instant.

An hour passed. The crimson splendor of the sunset had faded from the sky, the evening star shone tremulous, a faint new moon trembled on the verge of an opal sky, and a sighing breeze stirred the drooping leaves; and still the governess stood spell-bound, devouring that one brief paragraph with glittering eyes.

The heavy step and the whistle of the squire drew near; he had finished his smoke and was going in to tea. Miss Stone folded the paper, resumed her icy mask, and stepped out to meet him.

"Thanks for the 'Herald,'" she said; "you keep the back numbers on file, do you not, Squire Ryder?"

"Yes, my dear. Would you like to look over them?"

"If you please."

It was rather an odd fancy for a young lady, but Miss Stone was an oddity at best. After tea the file was produced, and the governess took it up to her own room. Yes, the advertisement was in them—as far as three months back, but differently worded in the first:

"Eleanor Lauriston—born Eleanor Lyon, formerly of Brookfield, Penn.—is earnestly requested to call on William Gilmer, Solicitor, No. — Fulton Street, where she will hear of something very much to her advantage."

Miss Stone literally devoured these paragraphs, her face so changed in its burning eagerness that Mrs. Ryder would

have been puzzled to know her marble governess. She sat over the papers while the night waned, knowing neither sleeplessness nor weariness, her eyes burning brightly.

"Can I do it—can I do it?" she said, clasping her hands wildly. "We were so much alike, and nine years have passed, and she is dead and in her grave. Is Fortune tired of hunting me down, and is there anything good in store for me at last? I will try it—I have everything to gain, nothing to lose, and I am desperate and reckless. If I fail, the river is open to all, and I will end this miserable mockery of life."

She threw herself on her bed in a fever of impatience. Morning was glimmering in the east already, but she dropped asleep, worn out with her long vigil.

Mrs. Squire Ryder, at breakfast that morning, was transfixed with astonishment and delight by Miss Stone's announcement of her immediate departure. She offered no explanation; family matters, she said, in her proud, cold way, required her immediate presence in New York. That day the noon train for the city bore off, among its passengers, Miss Stone, the mysterious governess.

CHAPTER V.

MISS STONE'S JOURNEY.

IN the silvery haze of the August twilight, Mrs. Ryder's governess reached the city. The lamps were lighted in the noisy streets, and the early stars spangled the sky, as the hack rattled down Broadway and into Cortlandt Street. Before a stately hotel the carriage stopped, and the lady alighted and swept in. She had but one small trunk and a valise, and her traveling-dress was of the plainest and cheapest in make and material; but the proud, pale face and black eyes told a story of their own that no one could fail to understand. She paused a moment on her way upstairs to register her name, "Mrs. Lauriston, New York City," in flowing Italian chirography.

It was too late, and she was too tired, after her long day's ride, to do more than take her supper and retire. She locked the door of her room and sat down by the open window, listening to the noises of the street, watching the passers-by and the bright stars that shone over the throbbing heart of the city.

"The first step has been taken," she thought, "the first step on a dark and dangerous journey. Whither will it lead me? To a life of ease and wealth and luxury, or to a suicide's dreadful death in yonder dark river?"

The noises of the night grew hushed—the beating pulse of life in the great city's heart grew slow and faint—the moon rose round and full, and the clock in St. Paul's Church struck eleven. Then, shivering in the warm night air, Mrs. Lauriston, late Miss Stone, rose from the window, lighted the gas, and drew forth from the bosom of her dress a letter. It was a woman's pale scrawl, the paper was yellow and limp with time, the date was four years before. She opened it and slowly read:

“MY SISTER ADELIA,—I write this on what may be my death-bed. I write it, not knowing that it may ever reach you. I write it, not knowing whether you will comply with the last request I shall ever make on earth. But in the wide world, Adelia—the big, cruel, pitiless world—I have no one left to turn to, no one in whose veins my own blood flows, but you. Oh! listen to me, my sister! By the memory of our happy home, of our dead mother, by the love we once bore each other, listen to me now while I plead for my child!

“Let me tell you my story, Adelia; my bliss and my misery that began after you left home, after your flight with Gerald Rosslyn. I don't reproach you—the time for that has long gone by; but you broke our father's heart—he sent me from home—he cursed you—he made me swear never to mention your name, and I was banished to live at Brookfield with Aunt Henshaw.

“Six months after, I met Launcelot Lauriston. Adelia, I don't think you ever loved Gerald Rosslyn half so dearly as I loved him. He had come to Brookfield for the summer fishing. He boarded with aunt. We were together the long, glorious summer days. I loved him, he loved me, as hot-headed sixteen and twenty will love. We were married privately. Aunt Henshaw only knew of it, for Launcelot's family were among the grandees of the land, and his mother, he told me, had set her heart on his marrying an English cousin—a high-born beauty and heiress.

“We were married, and he wrote to his mother telling her all. Adelia, his letter came back with half a dozen bitter lines from that proud and merciless mother. She disowned him—she cast him off forever. Let him beg or starve with the pauper he had chosen to marry, but let him never dare address her again.

“Aunt Henshaw was too poor to keep us, and Launcelot was too proud to linger there, if she had not been. He burned

his mother's cruel letter; he took me to the city; and, for the first time in his life, tried to earn his own bread.

"Adelia, I can not tell you, if I would, all the suffering, the poverty, the wretchedness of the next nine months. Two babes could hardly have been more helpless, cast upon the world, than we. Had Launcelot been a shoe-maker or a hod-carrier, he might have earned enough to keep soul and body together; being the pampered son of a haughty house, he was fit for nothing. We were literally starving, our home a garret, our food a crust. I never reproached him. I thank God for it now. I loved him with a love no starvation could overcome, no misery conquer. But he reproached himself—how bitterly no one knew but God and his own heart; and at last, in a fit of mad desperation—oh, Adelia! Adelia! let those blame him who never suffered—he committed a robbery and fled. The ill-gotten gain, to the last farthing, was sent to me. He shipped in a whaler and fled the country.

"I did not die—the dreadful blow did not kill me outright—but for weeks and weeks I lay ill unto death, and in the midst of my misery, six weeks later, my boy was born—my boy who looked up at me with his lost father's eyes, and for whose sake I lived then, and have dragged on life since—for whose sake I now write this confession to you.

"I am dying. I am in the hospital, and I am barely able to pen these lines. They have taken my darling away. I will never see him again; but you will, Adelia. For your dead sister's sake you will come here and find him, and take his mother's place. I have never heard from his father in all those four long years. He has gone before me, I know, and my struggle for bread has been hard and bitter. I inclose my marriage certificate and my wedding-ring and my husband's picture. He never heard of you—he never knew I had a sister; I kept my promise to my dead father, but you will befriend his son in his hour of need.

"I can write—no more. Come at once, if you can. A friend—a poor seamstress in whose room I have lived the past year—will tell you the story of my bitter battle with the world—will assist you to claim my boy. Her address is below. Adelia! Adelia! for pity's sake, listen to the dying prayer of

"Your sister,

"ELEANOR."

The letter dropped in her lap. Her face had not altered once in its changeless calm while she read. She drew forth a second folded paper and opened it. An ambrotype, a plain

gold ring, and the marriage certificate of "Launcelot Lauriston" and "Eleanor Lyon" dropped out. Inside the ring the initials "G. L. V." were curiously wrought. The solitary watcher looked at them long and anxiously.

"What can they mean?" she thought. "Those letters stand for neither his name nor hers. Can it be that Launcelot Lauriston was an assumed name, after all, and that Eleanor never knew the real one?"

She opened the ambrotype. The handsome, youthful face, smooth as a girl's, radiant as the sunshine, smiled frankly up at her, open and cheery—the brightest of bright, boyish faces.

"Will I know him again?" she thought. "Eight years have passed—more than eight years—since this picture was taken. The boy of twenty and the man of twenty-nine, bronzed and bearded and brown, will look little alike. He may be dead—he must be dead, or, loving Eleanor as she says he loved her, he would have written to her ere the four years were expired. And yet he may be alive and be the anxious inquirer who is seeking her through the columns of the 'Herald.' Or it may be that haughty mother, repentant and remorseful at last."

The City Hall clock struck twelve. The woman rose and held the letter to the gas until it fell in black ashes on the carpet. The ring, the picture, and the marriage certificate she refolded carefully and concealed in her bosom; and then, worn out with her long journey and her long vigil, she retired to bed. Immediately after breakfast next morning Mrs. Lauriston left the hotel, and made her way through an interminable maze of streets to one of the poorest and dirtiest localities of the east side. Selecting the shabbiest of the shabby tenement houses, she ascended the rickety stairs and inquired for Susan Brooks.

Susan Brooks was there and easily found. She came out on the landing—a haggard, wretched-looking woman—and asked the lady in black up to her room. As the lady threw back her veil, Susan Brooks recoiled with a frightened cry.

"Good Heaven!" she said, "it is the dead alive! It is Mrs. Lauriston—out of her grave!"

"I am Mrs. Lauriston's sister. You have heard her speak of me, I dare say."

"Often and often, poor soul! I beg your pardon, ma'am, but you're so like her that I declare you gave me a turn. It's like seeing her ghost!"

"My sister is dead, then?"

"Long and long ago. Died in Bellevue Hospital, poor

creature! I wasn't in the city at the time, but I saw her a few days before, and if ever death was written on a face, it was written plainly on hers."

"She died during your absence, then? Have you any proof of her death?"

"Proof?" said the woman, with a stare. "I didn't need any proof. She was dying when I saw her, and she knew it. I don't know how many days she lived after, but it couldn't be many. I was out of town in service at the time. She's dead, poor creature, and buried, safe enough; and a happy release it was!"

"And the child—the boy?"

Susan Brooks shook her head.

"Little Launce? I don't know what became of him. It was nearly a year after when I came back to New York, and I went to the orphan asylum where he had been placed to inquire. But he had been took away long before. They couldn't tell me where, and they couldn't tell me who took him; but he'd been took. 'Dopted, I suppose, by some one. Such a pretty boy as he was—the very image of his father!"

"Did you ever see his father?"

"No; but I saw his picture. Ah! what store poor Mrs. Lauriston set by that picture and her wedding-ring! She was starving many and many a time, but she would have died dead before she would part with them!"

"Miss Brooks," said the lady, "I have reason to suspect that Launcelot Lauriston was not that man's real name. Do you know if my sister suspected it, too?"

"She did," said Miss Brooks, decidedly. "She knew it wasn't. He told her so before he left; but he never told her what his real name was. His family had cast him off, he said, and he would never claim anything of theirs—not even their name."

"And this is all the information you have to give," said the lady, rising. "I am sorry I can not find my sister's child. I will leave you an address, and if you ever hear anything of him, you will let me know. Here it is. Excuse me for troubling you, and allow me to wish you good-day."

She slipped a coin into the paper on which the address was written, and laid it on the table. A moment later and she was gone. Susan Brooks looked after her with staring eyes.

"It's like seeing a ghost," she repeated—"like poor Eleanor Lauriston out of the grave. I never saw sisters so much alike."

The lady in black took an omnibus and rode down to Fulton

Street. She made her way straight to the office of Mr. Gilmer, ascended a long, dingy staircase, and entered an office, where two young men on high stools sat writing.

"This is Mr. Gilmer's office?"

"Yes, madame."

"Is Mr. Gilmer in?"

The clerk got off his stool and tapped at the door of an inner room.

"Lady to see you, sir," he said to some one inside.

"Tell the lady to come in."

Mrs. Lauriston crossed the office and entered the inner sanctum. A little bald-headed man looked up from the desk at which he was writing.

"You have business with me, madame?"

"I have, sir. You are the William Gilmer, I presume, who inserted this advertisement?"

She laid the "Herald" before him, pointing to that special paragraph among the "Personals."

"Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Gilmer, "light at last! I began to think we were hunting last year's partridges. You bring news of Eleanor Lauriston?"

"I do; I am Eleanor Lauriston."

She threw back her veil as she spoke, and the pale, resolute face—very pale just now—and the dauntless black eyes shone full upon him. The lawyer leaped up as if he had been shot.

"God bless me! Can it be possible? You are Eleanor Lauriston?"

"Yes."

"Then why the—I beg your pardon, madame—but why did you not answer the advertisement before? Why, we've been hunting for you for the past three months."

"I know it; but I am a very poor woman, Mr. Gilmer—obliged to work from early morning till late at night for the bread I eat. I have had no time for reading newspapers and no money to spare to buy them. It was by the merest accident I saw your advertisement yesterday in a borrowed 'Herald.'"

"And you have been in New York all this time, while we have been searching for you high and low?"

"I have not left New York since my husband deserted me—deserted me and my child, to die of misery and starvation. I don't blame him, Mr. Gilmer; but my life has been a very, very bitter one. Tell me if he is alive or dead—tell me if it is he who is searching for me now?"

"It is not. He has never been heard of since he fled from the city, I am sorry to say."

"Then it is his mother."

"My dear madame," the lawyer said, in the last degree surprised, "how do you know that?"

"Because there is no one else in the wide world interested in finding Eleanor Lyon—or Lauriston, if I really have any right to that name."

"You know that, too! You know Launcelot Lauriston was an assumed name! Then perhaps you know the real one, also?"

"No, Mr. Gilmer, I do not. Before he left me my husband told me that he had married me under an assumed name. His family cast him off for that low marriage, and from thenceforth he would claim nothing of theirs—not even their name."

"Like him!" muttered the lawyer—"like him! Always a proud, headstrong, obstinate boy! You are quite right, madame," aloud. "The name was assumed; and it is his mother—a lonely, childless old woman—sorry for the past, and most anxious to take to her home and heart her lost son's wife. But I beg your pardon; I have kept you standing all this time. Will you be seated, and tell me what proofs you have that you are the person you claim to be? It is a necessary form—only a form in this case, for I have seen your portrait, and your face is not one to be mistaken."

Mrs. Lauriston turned very pale.

"You have seen my portrait?" she slowly repeated.

"Yes, madame; I have it here in my desk at this present moment. When your husband wrote to his mother that first and last letter he inclosed the portrait of his bride. Nine years have changed you; but, as I said before, yours is not a face to be mistaken."

Mrs. Lauriston silently drew forth a packet and laid it before him.

"It contains my husband's picture," she said; "he gave it to me when we were first married. It contains my wedding-ring, with the initials 'G. L. V.'—the initials of his real name, as you doubtless know—inside, and it contains my marriage certificate. I have no other proofs to offer, Mr. Gilmer, save the history of the sorrowful past."

"No more is needed, my dear madame." He took up the articles one by one and carefully examined them. "I never doubted from the first that you were the person you claimed

to be. And your child—you spoke of a child, I think, born after its father's flight?"

"Born two months after."

"Girl or boy?"

A faint flush came momentarily into each pale cheek, but the bold black eyes never quailed.

"Girl," she said, resolutely.

"Ah! that's a pity. A boy to inherit and perpetuate the family glory and the family name would have suited the old madame's ambition so much better. But I suppose she must rest contented with an heiress instead of an heir. Your little girl is, then, eight years old?"

"Past eight—in her ninth year."

"Here, in New York, no doubt?"

"No, Mr. Gilmer; in the country. I could not take care of her and work for her in the city. I sent her to the country for the double sake of health and economy."

"And how long will it take you to send for her? You see, my dear lady, the old madame is in a fever of impatience to find you. I must telegraph to her at once, and she will insist on your immediately going to Maryland."

"To Maryland?"

"To Maryland—to Glen Gower. Permit me to congratulate you, madame, on being the daughter-in-law of Madame Varneck, of Glen Gower, the richest and proudest old lady in the State."

She laid her hand in his, that faint red glow rising in her cheeks again.

"Madame Varneck! Then my name is—"

"Mrs. Gilbert Lauriston Varneck. Exactly, madame. A proud old English name—and the Varnecks of Glen Gower came over with Lord Calvert. The Earl of Strathmore is Madame Varneck's second cousin—a fine old family, you see, in whom a little pride of birth and blood is natural and excusable. And now, that is all, I think. I will dispatch the welcome news to madame at once, and you will send for your little daughter, and prepare to depart at once for your future home. By the bye, does little missy look like papa?"

The lady had risen to depart, and she dropped her veil suddenly at this question.

"No," she said, coldly, turning away, "my little girl does not resemble her father."

"More's the pity! Well, Mrs. Varneck—we may drop the Lauriston now; it was old madame's maiden name—how soon will you be back from the country?"

"In two days—three at furthest."

"And where will I find you, to communicate madame's orders?"

"I will call here. Until then, Mr. Gilmer, farewell."

She bowed with the stately grace peculiar to her and flitted away. The old lawyer looked after her through his spectacles.

"A handsome woman and a resolute woman," he said, "but very little like the gentle angel poor Gilbert Varneck described in that first rapturous letter. The world has hardened her, no doubt—and all the better for her. She looks now as if she might hold her own against all the Varnecks and Lauristons alive! Our haughty madame will find her match at last in her handsome daughter-in-law!"

CHAPTER VI.

"LITTLE DORA."

IN the amber radiance of the sunny August afternoon the stage-coach drew up before a solitary farm-house in the heart of a New Jersey wood. Ten years had wrought little change here; the house was altered from a log cabin to a commodious frame building, the farm was enlarged and improved, but the lonely road was as lonely this blazing August afternoon as it had been that stormy September night ten long years before.

The stage-coach stopped and a lady alighted—a tall lady, dressed in black, and closely veiled. A young woman, with a baby in her arms, came out to the gate with a look of surprise.

"Mrs. Larkins lives here?" the veiled lady asked.

"Yes, ma'am; I'm Mrs. Larkins."

"You? Oh, no! I mean you are not the Mrs. Larkins I want. She must be quite an old woman now."

"You mean mother-in-law, I reckon," said the young woman, composedly. "She's dead."

"Dead?"

"Dead these four year and more. Did you use to know her?"

"I knew her ten years ago. She was very kind to me in a long illness I had here. And she is dead?"

"I bet you're the young lady I've heerd on!" cried Mrs. Larkins the second, with sudden animation. "Bob's told me about you time and time again. The young lady that was upset from the stage-coach one awful stormy night, and that was took here, and had a baby? Hey?"

"Yes—yes, I am the same. It is about that child I have come. Is she here?"

The young woman shook her head.

"I never seen her. I don't know nothin' about her. She hain't been here for years and years and years."

The veiled lady grasped the wooden railing for support.

"Don't tell me," she cried, in a frightened voice—"don't tell me my child is dead!"

"Not that I knows on. I dessay she's alive—safe enough. I only mean she ain't here. Granny Croak took her."

"Who?"

"Granny Croak—an old woman that goes out nursing, and takes care of children and such. She lives down to Lymeford. She's got your little gal."

"Thank Heaven! Thank Heaven, the child is alive! But how came this old woman to have her? Did Mrs. Larkins give her up?"

"Well, you see," said the second Mrs. Larkins, "you run away one night, so Bob says, and they never heard tale or tidings of you after. Mother-in-law had enough to do, what with the farm and all, without a baby on her hands. So she sent for Granny Croak, and she says to Granny: 'Here's a baby, three months old, and here's sixty dollars, what's left of a hundred its pa sent. Its ma's run away, and it most go to the poor-house if you don't take it. It's a pity to send it there, for it's a pretty baby, and a good baby,' says mother-in-law, 'and if you say the word, granny, the sixty dollars is yours. And the baby, she'll be a help to you,' says mother-in-law, 'afore you know where you are.' Well, ma'am, Granny Croak loves money if ever any one loved money yet. She grabbed the sixty dollars and she took the child. We ain't never seen it since. Lymeford is a good piece off, and we ain't no time for gadding 'round. All you got to do is to go to Lymeford and find Granny Croak, and make her give you the child."

"Thank you. Will you give me Mrs. Croak's address?"

"I can do better than that if you'll wait a minute. Bob—Bob's my husband, madame—he's going to Lymeford. He's getting ready now, and he'll take you to the very door."

As she spoke Bob himself appeared, driving the rudest of country wagons, loaded with green stuff for the Lymeford market.

"If you don't mind riding along with the garden sass in the wagon, ma'am, Bob will take you, and welcome."

"I don't in the least mind, and I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Larkins."

She slipped a silver dollar into the fat hand of the baby, and was assisted by Mr. Bob Larkins to a seat beside him, in a verdant bower of "garden sass."

The August sun was going down in an oriflamme of indescribable splendor as the primitive wagon drew up before the humble abode of Granny Croak. One dingy room, in a dingy tenement house, dirty and stuffy to the last degree, held the Lares and Penates of Mrs. Croak; and Mrs. Croak herself, as grimy as the room, sat on a stool in the chimney-corner smoking a pipe.

The lady did not remove her veil as she entered and seated herself on one of the few rickety chairs.

"You are Mrs. Croak?"

The old woman nodded without moving her pipe.

"Granny Croak. I goes out nussing. Do you want a nuss?"

"No; I want a child—a child left in your care ten years ago by Mrs. Larkins."

The old woman's pipe dropped out of her mouth and fell, shivered to atoms, on the hearth. She sat staring at her visitor in speechless amazement.

"I want that child," the lady repeated. "I am her mother!"

"Good Lord a-massy!" cried Granny Croak, under her breath, "who'd 'a' thought it?"

"I'll pay you well," the lady went on, "for your care of her in the past—pay you beyond your utmost expectations. Where is the child?"

But the old woman did not speak—could not speak. She sat staring at the lady with a blank stare of abject terror.

"Where is she?" impatiently repeated the veiled lady. "Why do you sit there with that frightened face? I tell you you shall be well paid for all your care and trouble. Good Heaven!" as a sudden thought struck her, "she is not ill—she is not dead?"

"Not dead!" repeated Granny Croak, in a hoarse whisper. "Oh, Lor', no! she's not dead! Oh, good gracious! To think of you coming for her after all these years!"

The lady drew out her purse and produced a shining cluster of bright gold dollars.

"Look here. I will give you all these to-day, and when I go to New York I will send you ten times as much. Only show me my child."

The old eyes of Granny Croak, bleared and dim, lighted up like the eyes of a young girl at the golden vision.

"All them bright gold dollars, and ten times as much more! Yes, yes, yes, yes! my pretty lady, you shall have your child!" She started up as she spoke, trembling with eagerness, and drew near. "But you won't know her. Mind, I warn you—you won't know your little girl. I'm a very poor old woman, and she's had to work. You haven't seen her since she was two months old, have you, my pretty lady?"

"No," said the lady, recoiling from the trembling eagerness of the old woman.

"No—I knew you didn't," rubbing her skinny hands in delight, "and you won't know her. Ten years is a long time—a very long time, my deary—and little girls change. But she's safe and well, and your own little daughter—I took good care of that. Wait a minute, my pretty lady, and I'll call her; she's only down-stairs."

She went out on the landing and leaned over.

"Dora!" she called, in a shrill voice—"Dora!"

"Coming, granny!" a child's voice answered. "What do you want?"

"I want you, my deary. Come upstairs."

A light step came springing fleetly up, and a bright little elf, with a dirty face, a ragged dress, unkempt hair and bare feet, bounded in. Two big bright eyes fixed themselves straight on the veiled lady in a wide, wondering stare.

"This is the little girl, my pretty lady. This is Dora."

Granny Croak shut the door and stood close to her visitor, her glistening eyes fixed greedily on the gold coins. The lady put out her gloved hand, drew the child near, and gazed long and earnestly in her face through her lowered veil.

It was a pretty face—undeniably a pretty face, despite dirt and sunburn—with regular features, dark-gray eyes, brown curly hair, rosy cheeks, and a gypsy skin. But not one look of her own statuesque beauty, not one look of handsome Gerald Rosslyn in all its bright prettiness. A cold chill of nameless fear fell on her heart.

"Woman," she said, facing suddenly round, "is this my child? Better for you you were dead and in your grave than dare deceive me!"

Granny Croak recoiled, with uplifted hands of fear.

"I ain't deceiving you. It's the very child Mrs. Larkins gave me ten years ago. If you don't believe me, go away. I'm fond of Dora, and Dora's fond of me, and we'll never part."

“Who named her Dora?”

“I did. I had a little girl of my own once of that name, and she died. Mrs. Larkins called her a queer name—Maldetta, I think—but I didn’t like that, and I changed it. If you don’t believe me you can leave her. I don’t want to part with Dora.”

“I must believe you, and I will take her. Wash her face, and dress her in the best you have got, and make haste. I want to leave Lymeford to-night.”

The old woman obeyed; she drew Dora into an inner room, and presently emerged with the child washed and dressed in her Sunday best. And, strange to say, old Granny Croak was crying.

“I’m fond of Dora, and Dora’s fond of me, and it’s very hard to part. Oh, deary me! I never thought I would have to give up Dora.”

“Let these console you,” said the veiled lady, pouring the golden shower into the horny old palm. “Come!”

She rose, took the child’s hand, and drew her out of the room. She had not given her one kiss, one caress; no spark of motherly love had lighted up in her cold heart. Little Dora, with wide, wondering eyes, submitted, “passive to all changes,” let herself be led to the carriage and driven away. They were in time for the train, and ere the blaze of the sunset had faded out of the sky Lymeford lay far behind them.

That night, as the midnight hour struck, little Dora lay asleep on the most luxurious bed wherein she had ever reposed. And with a shaded night-lamp in her hand, Dora’s mother stood bending over her, gazing earnestly on that childish face. The rounded cheeks were flushed, the bright brown curls were tossed over the pillow, the thick lashes veiled the radiance of those bright, gray eyes.

Long and earnestly the mother looked, but no sign of motherly love softened the cold beauty of that pale, fixed gaze.

“A pretty face,” she said; “but no look of her father, no look of her mother. They are a fair Saxon race, the Varnecks. Will she look like them? Is she my child, I wonder—my very child—or did that old hag deceive me for the money? I shall never know, I suppose, nor does it much matter. I have little reason to love Gerald Rosslyn’s child. She is only a stepping-stone on my way to fortune—the heiress of boundless wealth. Sleep, little girl, and your childish dreams should be bright, for let your father and mother be whom they may, you are the heiress of the wealthy Varnecks—the heiress of Glen Gower!”

CHAPTER VII.

GLEN GOWER.

"A BLEAK and dismal day—ominous and overcast—and a black, bad night. And, oh! how the slow, slow hours drag on! Only half past seven, and they can not be here before nine! Was ever a day so long as this?"

She was quite alone—the stately and handsome old lady who made this impatient complaint—walking up and down the long drawing-room, a spacious and lofty room, with a carpet of velvet pile, in whose yielding roses and lilies the feet sunk. Massive carved chairs and sofas, dark, rich paperings, heavy silken hangings, and priceless pictures in magnificent frames, made the room sumptuous with glowing colors. A grand piano stood in a recess; white marble statuettes, on black marble brackets, gleamed everywhere; flowers in slender Parian vases perfumed the air; alabaster lamps shed a soft, shimmering light over all, and a wood fire crackled cheerily on the marble hearth. For the August night was raw and rainy; the wind howled up from the bay in long, lamentable blasts, and the rain beat clamorously outside those purple silken window-curtains. A wild, wet night, dark as Erebus, and with a chill breath of winter in the howling sea-wind.

Up and down, up and down, the old lady walked, her black satin gown rustling softly, and a diamond star, fastening a point-lace kerchief on her bosom, blazing like a sun in the mellow lamp-light. Up and down, up and down, in a fever of impatience, glancing every other moment at her watch, or at the buhl clock ticking on the marble mantel. Sometimes she sunk for a moment into the violet velvet depths of a gilded *fauteuil*, but only for a moment. The feverish impatience within her would nowhere let her rest. As some wilder blast would dash the rain frantically against the glass, as the long sullen roar of the angry waves on the beach below, as the surging rush of the tossing trees awoke the deafening diapason of the tempest, she would start up again and resume that restless march.

Time and trouble had dealt very gently with Madame Varneck of Glen Gower, the proudest old lady in wide America. Her sixty years had silvered her once golden hair, had planted crows'-feet under the proud blue eyes and deepened the lines around the trim, patrician mouth. But those sixty years had left her stately and upright and handsome still, and not all the

tears those clear blue eyes had shed for her lost son had dimmed their eagle brightness.

"Is it ominous, I wonder?" she thought. "Superstitious people might think so. She comes to me, to her future home—my discarded son's wife—heralded by darkness and tempest, wind and rain. But I am not superstitious, and I shall love my son's wife and child for my lost son's sake. Gilbert—Gilbert, my son! where in all the wide world are you this dreary August night?"

She stood before the fire, with clasped hands and passionately yearning eyes. Above that marble mantel hung an oval portrait—the portrait of a blue-eyed, fair-haired, handsome lad in a Highland dress, his gun on his shoulder, his dog at his heels—Gilbert Lauriston Varneck at sixteen.

"My bright-haired, true-hearted, handsome boy!" the mother passionately cried; "and to think that I, your own mother, should be the first to cast you adrift in the wide, pitiless world, because you married the girl you loved! My boy—my boy! my repentance and atonement come too late; but, Heaven helping me, I will be a true mother to the wife you loved. The pride of the 'bitter, bad' Varnecks will never stand between me and my love for you again!"

Her forehead dropped on the cold marble; the proud old eyes filled with tears—big tears that gathered and fell slowly. Ah! she had loved him so dearly, so deeply. She had been so proud of her princely son; and her own cruel decree had driven him forth—a wanderer and an outcast forever.

The buhl clock softly chimed the hour; the embers fell through the shining grate. Outside the rain beat, and the wind blew, and the awful voice of the angry sea sounded high over all. A terrible night for a journey—a terrible night for Gilbert Varneck's wife and child to come to their new home!

Suddenly Madame Varneck started up. Over the surging of the trees, over the uproar of wind and waves and rain, the sound of carriage wheels rolling along the graveled drive caught her listening ears. Yes, they had come. Impetuously the old lady flung open the drawing-room door and swept out into the wide, lofty, lighted hall. A colored man-servant threw open the house door, and Mr. Gilmer, followed by a lady and a little girl, strode in.

"Heavens! what a night! How do you do, Madame Varneck? Here we are at last, despite the united forces of sky, and earth, and Hades. Madame Varneck, allow me to present Mrs. Gilbert Varneck and our little Miss Dora."

But madame, without waiting for that formal introduction,

had pushed past the lawyer and clasped her son's wife suddenly in her arms.

"My own dear daughter!" she said, kissing the pale, beautiful face; "welcome home!"

Perhaps the loving greeting was something so very new to Mrs. Gilbert Varneck, something so very unexpected—or perhaps she was hysterical—but the handsome head fell upon the stately old lady's shoulder, and she broke out into a perfect passion of weeping. Mr. Gilmer put on his spectacles, and looked on as though hardly able to believe his own eyes.

"Bless my soul!" he mentally ejaculated. "Who'd have thought it? She is not quite an iceberg, then, although she looks it. I never had such a good opinion of Gilbert Varneck's marble consort before."

"My dear—my dear!" the old lady murmured, softly, kissing the hidden face, and her own voice tremulous. "I have been a cruel mother in the past, but I am going to be very good to you. My lost darling's wife must ever hold the foremost place in my lonely old heart now. And this is my little girl—my Gilbert's child—my own dear little granddaughter—our pretty future heiress! Come here, my dear, and kiss grandmamma."

The child shyly advanced. She had been standing behind her mother, not clinging to her, as is childhood's wont, but standing a little apart, looking on with shining, solemn gray eyes. Mme. Varneck took her in her arms and kissed the shy little drooping face again and again.

"Gilbert's child—Gilbert's little daughter! Oh, my darling! you must love grandmamma very much, to make up for all she has lost. But come in. How selfish I am, keeping you standing here in this chill hall! Ah! how long the hours have been to-day! How impatiently I have waited for this moment! I am a very undisciplined old woman, I am afraid—as impatient and impetuous as ever, Mr. Gilmer."

"Impatience and impetuosity are family failings, madame," the lawyer answered, coolly. "I don't expect you will ever outgrow them."

He followed her into the long drawing-room—brilliant with fire-light and lamp-light—and the little girl uttered a low cry of surprise and delight at sight of all this hitherto unimagined splendor.

"Pretty, isn't it, Dora?" Mr. Gilmer said. "Better even than that gorgeous hotel mamma took you to, and whose radiant glories you can not forget."

"Dora has been used to very little splendor in her short

life time," said Dora's mother, speaking for the first time. "She has early learned the hard lesson of poverty and privation."

"But that is all at an end now," old madame interposed, gently. "My dear, let by-gones be by-gones. Our pretty little Dora will speedily forget the hard past in the bright present. Who is she like? Not you, my dear—and not her father."

She was looking earnestly, wistfully, in the small face—trying to trace some resemblance to her idolized son, and trying in vain. She glanced at the mother. No! the bright little rosy face, with its commonplace prettiness, was not in the least like that pale and perfect beauty.

"Eudora is like my family," Mrs. Gilbert said, answering that look; "but she is not like me, and not at all like her father."

"So I see." Mme. Varneck laid her hand on the bell as she spoke, with a cold feeling of disappointment at her heart. "But you are all three tired and hungry, I am certain, after your long and disagreeable journey. Your rooms are ready, and your luggage taken up, and dinner waits. Susie, show these ladies to their apartments. Mr. Gilmer, you know your own room. The dinner-bell will ring in twenty minutes."

Susie—a bright mulatto girl—courtesied and led the way up a grand, sweeping staircase, along a richly carpeted and pictured corridor, and into a sumptuous chamber fit for a princess. A fire burned on the hearth, wax candles stood lighted on the toilet-table—carpet, curtains, easy-chairs, and pictures were all perfection. The bed stood in a curtained recess, hung with curtains of rose silk under misty lace.

The large dark eyes of Mrs. Gilbert Varneck blazed up with a sudden triumphant light, and a passing flush of sensuous pleasure colored the marble whiteness of her face. And "Oh, how pretty!" cried little Dora. "This is the nicest house I ever saw in all my life, mamma!"

"Very likely, indeed," said mamma, coolly. "It is a very pretty room, and Glen Gower altogether is a very fine place. This is your chamber, Dora, I take it."

An inner door stood wide, disclosing the daintiest little white nest. The carpet was white—violets blooming in snow—the chairs were like polished ivory, cushioned in azure. Exquisite little statuettes glimmered in the pale light, and the bed was a snow-drift, curtained in foamy lace. At this dazzling sight Miss Eudora uttered an eloquent cry of rapture, and then stood in speechless ecstasy.

"And this is your bath-room, madame," said Susie, opening a second door; "and, if you please, I'm to be your maid and little missy's. Will madame please to open the trunks and let me dress her for dinner?"

Madame submitted with the grace of a born princess. It was decidedly a novel sensation for the ex-seamstress and governess, all this splendor and all this obsequious attention; but she took it with the haughty grace of one to the purple born. And when the noisy dinner-bell had ceased its clanging, and she swept down the grand stair-way, dressed in black silk, with a simple gold pin fastening her lace collar, and all her dead-black hair coiled like a coronet around her regal head, old Mme. Varneck was fain to admit that her handsome daughter-in-law would have graced a throne. Yes, she was very handsome, very stately, and as innately haughty and uplifted as if "all the blood of all the Howards" flowed blue in those plebeian veins; but, for all that, madame felt chilled and disappointed. Was this the gentle, loving, clinging creature Gilbert had written that eloquent letter about, a decade of years ago—this proud, pale, flashing-eyed, resolute-looking, imperious beauty?

Little Dora tripped after in a white muslin frock and blue sash, the brown hair freshly curled, and looking very bright and pretty. The old lady's lonely heart warmed to her, albeit there was no trace of her paternity in that sparkling little countenance.

"How do you like your rooms, my dear?" madame said.

"I chose a sunny, southern prospect. I hope they suit you?"

"They are perfect, madame," Mrs. Gilbert said. "As for Eudora, words are poor and weak to describe her raptures."

"I never saw anything half so lovely in all my life—grand-mamma!" said the child, with a shy pause before the title. "And are all the pretty things in that beautiful white room my own—my very own forever?"

"Your own forever, *petite*, and a thousand times as many pretty things. Wait until Eudora sees all the pretty dresses, and hats, and dolls, and picture-books, and the watch and the pony grandmamma is going to give her. You would like to have a watch and pony, wouldn't you, my pet?"

"Oh!" cried Eudora, rapturously; and "oh!" she cried once again as she followed grandmamma into the dining-room. No wonder she was dazzled, poor child, at all that array of cut-glass and shining silver and hot-house flowers, sparkling and flashing in the blaze of the chandelier—a won-

derful chandelier, where horse and hound hunted the deer through a forest of frosted silver.

Little Eudora sat at grandmamma's left hand, and feasted her eyes and her palate together throughout that wonderful meal. It was all a fairy tale, and grandmamma was the fairy godmother, and she the happiest little girl that ever danced in an enchanted castle.

"If Granny Croak could only see me now!" little Dora thought; but mamma had drilled her little girl pretty thoroughly during the past week, and Granny Croak was an interdicted name.

They went back to the drawing-room when that enchanted repast was over, and mamma sat down at the grand piano and played the wonderful melodies of Beethoven and Mozart, and grandmamma's thoughts went back to that last letter of her lost son and the wild rhapsodies he had gone into over the singing and playing of his angel. Was not every word of that last letter seared in letters of fire on the widowed mother's proud heart?

"You play beautifully, my daughter," she said, with a long, smothered sigh. "Will you not sing for us?—or perhaps you are too much fatigued."

"I am not in the least fatigued, madame. What shall I sing?"

"Whatever you like best, my dear."

She chose an old ballad—"Robin Adair"—and she sung well, in a clear soprano; but Mme. Varneck was disappointed. The song was sweet, but she sung without feeling.

The little party separated early—Dora was dropping asleep in the warmth of the fire, with her curly head in grandmamma's black satin lap. Susie—the intelligent mulatto maid—conducted Mrs. Gilbert Varneck and Eudora upstairs to their pretty rooms. Grandmamma took them both in her arms before she let them go.

"Good-night, and God bless both my children!" she said, her voice tremulous. "Oh, my daughter, try to love me for Gilbert's sake—for my old heart is very lonely!"

And Mrs. Gilbert's cold, thin lips just touched the old lady's forehead in an empty kiss, and then she was gone—up in the light and bloom and beauty of her beautiful room.

Susie undressed little missy and curled her up in the fragrant lace and linen of her snow-white nest. Then she was abruptly dismissed—her new mistress chose to undress herself—quietly turned out, and the door locked in her face.

And she was alone—the handsome adventuress who had

boldly risked so much, who had played so daring a game, and who had won. She stood before the fire, looking down in its dying depths, and the bold, handsome face was all alight with triumph as she gazed.

“And all this is mine!” she said under her breath, looking triumphantly around. “Wealth and luxury, and ease and honor, for the rest of my life. I have played a desperate game, but I have won—I have won!”

Her eyes fell upon a portrait over the mantel—a portrait of Gilbert Varneck at nineteen, taken just before that fatal visit North, for his doting mother. The bright, handsome face smiled frankly down on her, radiant as if alive.

“How handsome he was!” she thought; “and how good he looks! If I had been the wife of such a man as that, what a different woman I might be! But Gerald Rosslyn was a fiend incarnate, and he made another of me!”

Half an hour later dead silence reigned within the house; every light was extinguished; all had retired. But Mme. Varneck’s new daughter did not sleep. She lay tossing restlessly, looking at the lurid glow of the dying fire, and listening to the wild wind and rain of the stormy night.

The midnight hour was long past before she dropped into a feverish slumber, and then only to be disturbed by weird dreams. Now it was her dead sister who stood by her bedside—a pale, reproachful ghost.

“I trusted you, Adelia,” the dead lips seemed to say, “and see how you betrayed that trust!”

The pale specter flitted away and another came in its stead—Gilbert Varneck, stern and terrible, with angry eyes and menacing gesture.

“I am coming!” the stern lips seemed to say. “Liar and impostor, beware!”

And with a low cry of terror and the cold drops standing on her brow, the dreamer awoke—to sleep no more—to turn her panic-stricken face to the wall and wait for the morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMING.

MR. GILMER, the lawyer, departed immediately after breakfast. Pressing professional engagements, the old gentleman pleaded, kept him bound to the treadmill, and compelled him to tear himself away from the enchantments of Glen Gower. Little Dora and the two ladies stood in the portico and

watched him drive away in a radiant morning sunburst. Mr. Gilmer waved his handkerchief to them and disappeared.

"They won't quarrel, after all," he thought. "The old one's too polite and the young one's too politic. And yet they've each got the pride and the temper of the Miltonic Lucifer himself."

It was one of those jubilant summer mornings, of brightest sunshine and balmy breezes, that follow violent rain-storms. The swelling meadows where the red cows cropped, the sloping, velvety lawns, the dark woods, and the old-fashioned pleasure-grounds were all a-glitter with rain-drops shining in the sun as if sown with stars. The old house—a strong, square structure of red sandstone—stood on a sloping eminence, and from the portico where they lingered Mme. Varneck's daughter-in-law could see far and wide.

"Look around you, Dora, my dear," the old lady said, with a proud smile and a kindling eye—"look around, my little heiress; for all you can see is your own. We Varnecks have held this noble estate since the days of Lord Calvert."

Little Dora's bright gray eyes danced over the sunlit prospect. Yes, it was very fair in the jocund sunshine of the glorious August morning—from those lofty entrance gates, with the arms of the Varnecks' emblazoned thereon, to the noble avenue of oak and beech, the green glades, the leafy arcades of the deep, dark woodland, the smooth-rolled lawn, with a huge fish-pond in the center where gold and silver fishes swam, to the sunny stone terraces where gaudy peacocks strutted. A fountain, where graceful naiads disported, splashed in its marble basin, and the long, quaint flower garden was all a-bloom with red and creamy roses, Cape jasmine, and magnolias. Behind the house spread away a little village of outhouses and the quarters of the colored people, with a grand old orchard, rich with fruit, and beyond all the blue, bright, boundless sea. Little Dora clapped her hands in an ecstasy of childish delight.

"Oh! how pretty!" she cried. "Oh, grandmamma, it is like heaven, this place!"

Grandmamma laughed, very well pleased, and patted the rosy cheek.

"Little enthusiast! Not quite, I hope. But I am glad the heiress of Glen Gower likes her ancestral home. Would you not wish to see the house? And you, my daughter?"

"If it does not inconvenience you, madame."

"My daughter"—there was infinite gentleness in the proud

voice—"is it, then, so hard to say mother? For Gilbert's sake, Eleanor—we both loved him!"

The pale face of Mrs. Gilbert Varneck turned, for an instant, ashen white. But, stooping, she kissed the shapely old hand, and hid that passing spasm.

"Dear mother! it does not need his memory to make me love you. You overpower me! Ah, mother, I am so little used to love!"

"We will make you forget the past. Come, little Dora, and see your home."

She led the way into a long, pretty room, all glowing with gold and cinnamon. The domed ceiling was painted, the walls were tinted brightest rose, the carpet was crimson velvet, and the chairs and sofas cushioned in the same. The tall windows were draped with crimson satin damask, and swinging doors of massive plate-glass, at the further extremity, showed a conservatory with tinkling fountains.

"This is the winter drawing-room," madame said, passing through. "These bright colors have a very snug effect on a piercing winter day. This is our conservatory, and the pride of the house."

She flung open the glass doors and led the way in. Little Dora uttered another cry of delight and wonder at sight of the tall tropical plants, the orange and myrtle-trees, the splendid roses, the pale Floras, and dryads and nymphs, the birds singing in gilded cages, the gold-fish swimming in marble basins, and the August sunshine glorifying all.

A second door, opening from the conservatory, led them back to the entrance hall, paved in mosaic of black and white marble. Madame led the way into a library, all lined with dark, rich book-cases, with one large Venetian window, and a ceiling in compartments of gold and azure. Busts and bronzes on massive black marble pedestals stood around, and portraits of Mme. Varneck and her late husband, in oval frames, looked down at you from over the carved chimney-piece.

"You have seen the dining-room and the summer drawing room," madame said; "so now we will go upstairs."

The stair-way was rich in busts and statues, and the upper hall richly carpeted, and columned in marble. An oriel window was at one extremity, through which the soft, abundant light showered, and portraits of dead and gone Varnecks smiled grimly down from the oak-paneled walls.

"And here is our state bedroom," madame says, throwing open the door of a sumptuous chamber—"only used upon the

visit of some guest of distinction, or the marriage of the son or daughter of the house.”

Even Mrs. Gilbert utters an exclamation of surprise and admiration, for nothing so stately or gorgeous has ever entered her dreams before. Madame gives them time to examine its splendors before she leads the way to a second sleeping-room. A very simple room this—the floor covered with delicate Indian matting, the walls hung with pictures of dogs and deer, and celebrated beauties of the French court, and with guns and pistols, and swords and sabers, and fishing apparatus, in racks along the wall. Turkish pipes and chibouques, meerschauums and cigar-cases, strew the tables; a velvet smoking-cap lies on the bed; a crimson dressing-gown is thrown carelessly across a chair, as if the wearer had but just taken it off; French novels and plays are strewn about, and slippers and riding-whips are everywhere. Mme. Varneck's face works a little.

“It was my son's room,” she said; “and everything is just as he left it.”

Once again that white change passed over the face of Mrs. Gilbert Varneck, and an icy hand seemed to clutch her heart. She paused on the threshold, as if she dared go no further.

“If I had only been his wife,” she thought, “how dearly I might have loved him! What a good woman I might have been! How precious and how sacred all these things would be to me now!”

Mme. Varneck took them next to her own apartments—bedroom, bath-room, dressing-room *en suite*. Then there were other chambers, and a cozy nursery and morning-room, and a little study that had been Gilbert's. And all along the hall were rare old cabinets, and foreign vases taller than little Dora, and superb bronzes, and an array of priceless old china and bric-a-brac, until the little girl's head ached and her eyes were dazzled from the constant succession of new wonders.

“It is superb—it is magnificent!” Mrs. Gilbert said, as they retraced their steps. “I have read of such houses. I never expected to see one in this country.”

“Our house is the same and modeled after a far older house in England—Lord Strathmore's country seat,” replied madame, proudly. “The Earl of Strathmore is my cousin, you know, my dear. There is nothing like Glen Gower in the State—nothing to surpass it, I flatter myself, in the country. We come of an old stock and a proud stock, we Lauristons and Varnecks, and Gilbert was the last of our race—our pride and our hope. We looked to him to add new splendor to our

ancient name; we had set our heart upon his marriage with the Lady Hortense Eddersdale, his distant cousin. She is a marchioness now, my dear, but she would have married my son. And when he wrote me that letter, telling me all the dreams of my life were dashed to the earth—telling me he had wooed and won a bride rich in youth and beauty, and gentleness and love, and poor in all things else—oh, Eleanor, try to put yourself in my place, and blame me for my answer if you can!”

“It was very natural,” the younger lady murmured, cold and pale.

They had returned to the pleasant drawing-room, and were seated in the sunlit window, alone. Little Dora was romping with a tawny hound up and down the long stone terrace.

“I cast him off,” Mme. Varneck went on, “although my heart broke in the effort. I can not tell you how cruel, how bitter, was the awakening from all my dreams. I thought him the silly dupe of some scheming adventuress. I would not look at it in its true light. I would make no allowance for hot-headed youth and romantic first love. I cast him off, and I shut myself up here, a miserable, lonely, broken-hearted woman. Then came the news of that robbery and his flight, and it laid me upon a sick-bed—ill unto death. Ah! my child, instead of softening my heart, it hardened it more and more. I grew to hate the daughter-in-law I had never seen—for I looked upon her as the primary cause of all my woe. I rose from that sick-bed as wretched a woman as ever the sun shone on. ‘And still my days went on, went on,’ though all that had made life dear was lost. But the first soreness and bitterness slowly wore away, and when I gave up all hope of ever seeing Gilbert again, my thoughts wandered to Gilbert’s wife, and child, perhaps—for I thought there might be a child. So there, my dear, you know all, and we two lonely women must learn to love each other for the sake of the beloved one forever lost!”

“Forever?” the younger woman slowly repeated. “Then you think your son is dead?”

“How can I think otherwise?” madame said, shrinking a little at the question, and the manner in which it was asked. “If he were alive, you would surely have heard from him long ere this. No, my dear—there is no hope.”

A sudden, inexplicable look flashed across the face of the woman who called herself Eleanor Varneck that in any other face would have been a look of triumph.

“And you, Eleanor,” madame said, laying her hand upon

her arm, and looking earnestly in the handsome, resolute face—"your life has been a hard one, I fear, since you lost your husband."

"So hard," Eleanor Varneck said, her black eyes flaming suddenly up, "that I wonder I did not go down to the dark and dismal river and end its long misery at once—so hard, Madame Varneck, that I never wish to speak of it—never wish to think of it; its faintest recollection is horrible; so hard, that my life was one long martyrdom—one long torture—bitter, degrading, revolting. At eighteen I was left alone in the big, cruel world, of whose misery and crime I was as ignorant as a baby, to fight my way alone as best I could for myself and my child. And, madame, I had never been used to work. We had never been rich—neither had we been poor. My father was a country clergyman, able to educate his daughters as ladies should be educated—able to dress them well and save them from the drudgery of life. But when Gilbert deserted me, hard labor or the cold river-bed, or the tender mercies of the work-house, were my alternatives. I chose the former. I sent my child away into the country. I was waitress, seamstress, nursery governess—anything by which I could earn a crust to eat and a few poor garments to wear. The slights, the sneers, the insults, the dangers I have endured in the most miserable past drive me wild when I think of them. I only wonder they did not drive me mad at the time. I was a gentle, loving, timid girl—I am a hard, resolute, imbittered woman. Those who knew me ten years ago would be puzzled and shocked to recognize me now. My life has been a hard, a cruel, a bitter one, Madame Varneck—and I want to forget it if I can!"

The passionate words poured out like a torrent; the beautiful face darkened vindictively; the great black eyes flashed fire. Mme. Varneck shrunk, appalled, before the dark spirit she had aroused.

"My dear—my dear!" she said, appealingly, "I did not think you felt like this. My love, try to overcome this terrible bitterness of spirit, for the discipline of the past may have been sent—must have been sent—to purify you and make you a better woman."

Gilbert Varneck's wife broke into a bitter laugh.

"It has failed signally, then. Madame, let us drop this subject. I never want to speak of it, or think of it, if I can."

"As you please, my dear."

She sighed as she said it. She was cruelly disappointed in her new daughter—this dark, vindictive, passionate woman,

when she had hoped for the Madonna-faced, dove-eyed bride Gilbert had raved of long ago.

From that day they never spoke of the past; it seemed to drop out of their lives as though it had never been; and their new existence fairly began.

All the country families for miles around, even to the city of Baltimore, heard the wonderful news that Gilbert Varneck's deserted wife had found a home at Glen Gower. They could hardly realize it—Mme. Varneck, the proudest old woman in wide America, hunt up her cast-off son's plebeian wife and take her to her patrician bosom, from the slime and dregs of city life!

But it was true—an incontrovertible fact—and the country families began, in a burning fever of curiosity, to call. They remembered Gilbert Varneck—blue-eyed, fair-haired, handsome, impetuous Gilbert—and they remembered the shock his low marriage had been throughout the State. And now they were to see that low-born bride—that ex-actress, or ballet-dancer, or milliner's apprentice, or something else equally disreputable—a vulgar creature, no doubt, who would blush and stammer in their august presence, and murder Lindley Murray and excoriate madame's pride ten thousand times a day.

They began to call from far and wide; and Mme. Varneck, more haughtily uplifted than ever, received them like a royal duchess, and presented them proudly to "my daughter—Mrs. Gilbert Varneck." And a real divinity, with a grandly beautiful face and the manner of a princess born, looked at them out of two flashing black eyes, and received their obeisance with magnificent *hauteur*. She felt instinctively they came to patronize, and she froze them with one blaze of those glorious black eyes. Mme. Varneck might find it hard to love this statuesque daughter-in-law, but it was very easy indeed to be proud of her.

Two weeks had passed since the great event had electrified the community, when a second and far greater shock thrilled through every heart.

It was on the occasion of a large dinner-party at Glen Gower, and the long dining-room was one blaze of light, and the dinner was a feast for the gods. Mme. Varneck, in black velvet and family diamonds, presided with the grand grace of a queen, and Mrs. Gilbert, in maize moiré and starry opals, was bewilderingly beautiful—too gorgeous to tell. Little Dora was there, too, as an especial treat, fresh and sweet as a rosebud, in snowy muslin and fluttering pink ribbons, and not in

the least daunted by all that crowd of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen.

They had adjourned to the drawing-room, and Mrs. Gilbert at the piano was doing brilliant execution, and old madame's face was all aglow with pride and pleasure, when Maria, her pretty quadroon maid, appeared at the door and summoned her mysteriously away.

"It's a young man from the village, with a letter," said Maria. "He's at the door—and, please, missis, he says how you must sign your name afore he gives it."

"A telegram, perhaps," said madame, surprised. "Who can it be from?"

It proved to be from Mr. Gilmer. An instant later the company in the drawing-room were electrified by a shrill scream. Wildly excited, Mme. Varneck burst into their midst.

"He is alive! he is coming! Eleanor! Eleanor! he is alive and well! Oh, thank God! thank God! thank God!"

And then, with a burst of wild laughter, self-possessed Mme. Varneck fell back in Maria's arms, in violent hysterics.

Eleanor Varneck rose from the piano, picked up the telegram, and calmly read it aloud:

"MADAME VARNECK,—Your son is alive and well—reached New York an hour ago. Have told him all. Will start for home immediately. May expect him in two days.

"WILLIAM GILMER."

The company dispersed in wildest excitement. Madame, in strong hysterics, was borne away to her room. Maria and Susie and Mrs. Gilbert remained with her until far into the night before the hysterics gave way and she fell into a sound sleep. Then, and not till then, the younger lady retired to her own apartment—but not to sleep.

No, not to sleep. Should she ever sleep again? Dead, and in her coffin, she could never look more ghastly than she looked now. In all the beauty and luxury of her dainty room, she sunk down by the bed, her face buried in her hands, as miserable a woman as ever battled with her despair.

"Oh, great God!" she thought; "and has it all been for nothing—the lies and the deception? And must I go back to the old misery and the old horrors, after all? I have deceived the lawyer, I have deceived the mother, but who will deceive the husband?"

CHAPTER IX.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE steam packet "Europa" was within two hours' sail of her destination. Her passengers had all gone thronging forward to catch the first welcome glimpse of the modern Gotham. No, not all. One passenger held himself aloof, lounging against a pillar on the after-deck, smoking a cigar, and staring straight before him at the sunlit ocean.

He was a stalwart man of thirty—unmistakably handsome, unmistakably a soldier. The face was bronzed and weather-beaten, and a thick mustache and beautiful, dark-brown beard concealed and adorned the resolute mouth. The great blue eyes stared at you frankly out of the soldierly, sunburned face, and the scar of a saber cut ran transversely all along the left cheek, from ear to chin. The August day was warm, but the bronzed soldier was buttoned up to the throat in a shaggy great-coat. As he stood there, solitary and alone, a man came noiselessly behind him, and a slender white hand, as shapely as a woman's, fell lightly on his shoulder.

"'Apart from the vulgar herd, I dream my dreams alone!'" quoted a deep, musical voice. "Have you no curiosity to behold again your native land, my colonel? Lo! the spires, and domes, and minarets of gorgeous New York glisten already in the summer sun!"

"Don't be an idiot, Dandin, and don't be hifalutin," said the colonel, with a shrug. "No—I have no particular desire to catch the first glimpse of dirty New York. I haven't set foot on my native land for ten long years, Captain Dandin, and now that it draws near, I dread the sight as I never dreaded death from a Sepoy bullet, in all our horrible Indian mutiny. A blow worse than any death those black fiends could inflict may await me there."

"As how? But pardon! It may be impertinent to ask."

The stalwart colonel flung his cigar overboard, stared after it moodily for an instant, then suddenly linked his arm in that of his companion, and began pacing up and down the deserted promenade-deck.

They were a striking contrast, those two men, in all but age, which was the same. The stalwart colonel, brown and bearded and handsome—the very *beau idéal* of a gallant soldier. And Captain Dandin—but Captain Dandin requires a rather particular description.

He was very tall and slender, and his face was of a fixed and deathly pallor. Jet-black hair and whiskers rendered his ghastly pallor all the more striking, and two piercing black eyes looked out from under heavy black brows. Captain Dandin might have been a remarkably handsome man, despite that corpse-like pallor, but for one singular disfigurement—he had lost his nose. The spot where that ornamental appendage should have been was supplied by a circular patch of flesh-colored plaster, and the loss gave the man a peculiarly sinister and disagreeable expression. He had lost it in a duel many years ago, he had told the colonel carelessly, and had grown reconciled to go through life noseless by this time, although it had been a very handsome member in its day, and he had nearly gone mad with mortification at first.

“For I was a handsome fellow in my time, Colonel Varneck,” the noseless captain said, with a laugh. “And that shot changed me from an Adonis to a Caliban. It lost me a wife, too.”

“Lost you a wife? Oh, I suppose your fiancée backed from her engagement with a gentleman deprived of a nose?”

“Not so, *mon ami*,” the captain said, coolly; “she was already my wife.”

“And she deserted you for that? Why, good Heaven, Dandin! What a heartless creature she must have been!”

“All women are heartless, my colonel—when you come to find them out. My pretty bride—she was in the first blush of bridehood then—was an heiress, and a beauty, and a reigning belle. I was a poor wretch, and my stock in trade was my handsome face and elegant manners. I made the most of my stock in trade and what is vulgarly called ‘the gift of the gab,’ and my pretty heiress fell desperately in love with the penniless irresistible. She married me, Varneck, and that diabolical pistol-bullet came whizzing along and ‘snapped off my nose,’ as the blackbird, in the nursery legend, snapped off the maid’s in the garden. They thought I was dead at first—and, by Jove! madame would have infinitely preferred being an interesting young widow in crape and sables to being the mortified wife of a hideous husband. I pass over the scenes that followed—the tears, the hysterics, the wild lamentations. She abhorred the sight of me. She had married me for my beauty, and she had been cruelly, shamefully taken in and lone for. Papa and mamma had never approved of the match, and rather rejoiced in the turn affairs had taken; so—well, my colonel, we effected a compromise. They were rich, I was poor, and money is the great lever that moves the

world. A certain sum changed hands; there was a quiet divorce, without *éclat* or scandal. Madame became mademoiselle once more, and went abroad with papa and mamma. I read her marriage in an English paper eight months after. She had hooked a baronet the second time. I have never seen her since, and I don't wish to."

"And you?" the colonel asked.

"I went abroad, also, my friend—went to Spain, and took my daughter with me."

"But you said—I thought—"

Captain Dandin laughed—a sinister and most unpleasant laugh.

"I never said, my colonel, that Fairy was the daughter of my heartless bride. Oh, no! madame knew nothing of her existence—not that it would have mattered much. I took Fairy to Spain—she was a disagreeable nuisance in long robes at the time. But I had a particular spite against Fairy's mother, and so removed her out of the country. There's my story for you, colonel, and the history of the loss of my nose. I might be a millionaire to-day, and one of the chief burghers of New York City, instead of the beggarly adventurer and soldier of fortune I am, if I had only retained that member. On such trifles hinge the destiny of the puppet called man."

"The loss of one's nose is no trifle, by George!" said the colonel, gravely, feeling his own. "But your wife, Dandin, was a very demon in petticoats. To think of her deserting you for that! It's enough to make you forswear the sex."

"I forswore them long ago, colonel. If I were a modern Alexander, and ruled the world, I would make a suttee of the whole of them—one grand holocaust—and burn them all in the same vast funeral pyre. Yes, I hate women—one woman in particular, and if I ever meet her"—he stopped, and set his white teeth vindictively—"I'll make that woman suffer such agonies as never woman suffered before."

"By George!" cried Colonel Varneck, staring with his big, blue eyes. "Your wife, I suppose?"

"No—not my wife. Never mind who. I have come back to America to search for her—and I'll find her if she's above ground. And when I do—"

He stopped, and the black, vindictive hatred of his face was something diabolical.

The two men had been very intimate during the homeward voyage. They had met many years before in Spain, and Captain Dandin had saved the life of Colonel Varneck. Their paths had diverged after that, and they had met again by the

merest chance on board the "Europa." One moonlight night, pacing the deck, the noseless captain had taken the colonel into his confidence thus far, but beyond that he had never gone, and of Colonel Varneck he knew no more than his name.

To-day, however, with the land in view, and old memories filling his heart, the handsome colonel threw off his reticence, and told his story to his companion.

"You told me once, Dandin," he said, "you were returning to search for a woman—well, so am I. You, for the woman you hate; I, for the woman I love. Somewhere in yonder big city, ten years ago, I deserted a wife—to-day I come back to find her."

Captain Dandin drew out a cigar and lighted it.

"You married, my colonel?" he said, gayly. "I should never have suspected you of such folly."

"I married a wife ten years ago, Dandin. I married the girl I loved—the penniless daughter of a country clergyman, beautiful as an angel, and as good and pure. I married her, Dandin, under an assumed name, disgraced my haughty mother, and was cast off at twenty, to beg or starve as I chose."

"Just my case reversed. Romantic, no doubt, but decidedly unpleasant. What a fool you were, Varneck!"

"No doubt—but it is a folly I have never regretted. Were you ever in love, Dandin?"

"Never—like that. Ten years ago, I, too, was bewildered by raven tresses and a pair of black eyes, but all the folly was on her side—poor little girl. You gave the world for love, and thought it well lost. I didn't; I left that part to her."

"Dandin, I'm afraid you've been a villain!"

"I'm afraid so, too," replied Captain Dandin, airily; "however, we won't discuss the subject at present. How did you and your angel get on?"

"We starved. I took her to the city. I kept the name my mother was so proud of carefully concealed—I was Launcelot Lauriston, not Gilbert Varneck. And we starved, Dandin. Day by day, I tramped the pitiless city looking for work, and I found men's hearts harder than the paving-stones I trod on; day by day, I returned home, dispirited and despairing; day by day, I saw my darling's face grow whiter and thinner. Cold and hunger and hardship she endured, but the angel smile never left her eye. Not once did she complain—not once did she reproach me. But, oh, my God! was there ever a moment, night or day, sleeping or waking, when I ceased

to reproach myself? At last I grew mad—I grew desperate, reckless; we were literally starving. It was the bitter heart of winter, and at a time when my darling needed warmth and food most. One night a rich man was knocked down and robbed on the public street—and, Dandin, I was the robber. Half the money I inclosed in a letter to my wife, the other half I kept and fled. I never saw her again; I have never heard of her since. The good God alone knows what has become of her and her child, but if Eleanor Lyon is alive on this wide earth, I will find her before I die.”

Captain Dandin had been listening negligently enough to the story, but as the colonel uttered his wife's name the cigar he had been smoking dropped upon the deck, and his eyes fixed themselves on the agitated face with a wondering stare.

“Who?” he said, sharply—“whom did you say?”

“Eleanor Lyon was my wife's maiden name. She knew me only as Launcelot Lauriston, but she more than suspected that was not my true appellation. Why, Dandin, how you stare! You never knew Eleanor Lyon?”

“No,” said Captain Dandin, slowly; “perhaps not—but I think I once knew her sister.”

“Her sister! She had no sister; she had no living relatives—for her father died a month after our marriage. You must be mistaken.”

“Ah! no doubt!” The queerest smile went flickering about his mouth as he said it. “Lyon is no uncommon name. What do you mean to do first?”

“Go to the house where I left her. It is but one chance in a thousand my hearing of her there now, but I will try. I will advertise; I will set detectives on her track—I will move heaven and earth to find my lost wife.”

“Ten years is a tolerable time. She may be dead.”

“For God's sake, Dandin!” He stopped short, turning ghastly white. “No, no, no, no! My wife is alive—poor, ill, suffering, changed, perhaps, but alive. I loved her, I think, as no husband ever loved his wife before. I should go mad if I lost her now.”

“Ten years is a long time,” Captain Dandin reiterated. “You may find her—if you do find her—very unlike the angel you left; prematurely old and wrinkled, and haggard and gray, the youth and beauty forever gone.”

“What do I care,” cried the impetuous colonel, “so that I find my darling alive? I will love her the better for the wrinkles and the gray hairs. Do you think I have not changed? It would puzzle my lady mother, or my loving

little Nelly, to recognize in the big, bearded, browned soldier the fair-faced, slender stripling who left them a decade of years ago. Let me find her alive and well—changed out of all human knowledge—let me only find her, and I will ask no more of Fate. My love! my love! to think of all you have suffered for me!”

Captain Dandin held out his hand.

“You have my best wishes, my colonel. If I can aid you in any way, command me. I don’t believe in petticoated angels myself, but then my experience of the sex has been rather unfortunate.”

An hour later and the two men were treading the solid pave and were stunned by the first crash and din of Babel life.

“I’m for the Astor—my old quarters,” Captain Dandin said; “and you, *mon ami*?”

“I shall begin my search at once,” was the reply. “I shall seek out the street and the house where I left my wife before I cross any other threshold.”

“And find the house pulled down half a dozen years ago,” muttered the skeptical captain; “however, success to you. You will know where to look me up. Oh, by the way, I say, Varneck!”

As he raised his voice with the last call, a gentleman walking rapidly along came to a sudden halt, and wheeling round, faced the two men.

“Varneck!” he muttered; “the very name that was uppermost in my thoughts. Good Heaven! if it should be he!”

He stood with his eyes fixed on the handsome young colonel, staring blankly.

“Ten years would change him, surely, and hot suns will turn men tan color. The beard and the mustache are new to me, but surely, surely, if Gilbert Lauriston Varneck is in the flesh, yonder he stands.”

“Monsieur does not spare us,” said a politely mocking voice. “Is it my hideousness, or my friend’s remarkable good looks?”

Before the third party thus accosted could reply, Colonel Varneck sprung forward with something like a shout.

“Gilmer, by everything that’s lucky! and every day as young as this time ten years! Why, Gilmer, old fellow, how goes it?”

“Gilbert Varneck!” gasped the lawyer.

“To be sure, Gilbert Varneck. You knew I would come back on your hands, didn’t you? Bad shillings always do. And how have you been all those eternal ages?”

"When did you land?" Mr. Gilmer was just able to gasp.

"Half an hour ago, and never thinking I should stumble over an old friend the first step."

"Then you haven't heard—but of course you haven't."

"Of course, if you say so. What is it?"

"Your wife—"

Gilbert Varneck's hand closed convulsively over that of the lawyer.

"My wife! For God's sake, do you know anything of my wife?"

"Everything, and everything good," said the lawyer, triumphantly. "We hunted her up—your mother and me—and now she is safely domesticated at Glen Gower, with her daughter. Gilbert, my boy, the old mother is dying for one sight of her lost son."

But Gilbert Varneck had staggered back against a lamp-post, white and faint as a swooning woman.

"Thank God!"

His heart cried "thank God!" but his lips were dumb.

"Come, come, my lad!" the old lawyer said, slapping him cheerily on the back; "good news shouldn't knock a big fellow like you over in this way. And, bless my soul, what a big fellow you've got to be! And that wife of yours—'pon my word, Gilbert, she's more like a black-eyed sultana than an every-day Christian. And the little daughter—bright as a rosebud and plump as a peach! They're a credit to you, Gilbert, my boy, both of them. But we can't talk in the street; come along to my office and I'll telegraph to the mother at once."

"*Au revoir, mon colonel!*" cried Captain Dandin, touching his hat. "I reserve my congratulations until later."

He sauntered away humming an air; and Mr. Gilmer, hailing a Fulton Ferry stage, dragged his stupefied companion along with him, and disappeared.

Captain Dandin made his way to his hotel, humming an opera air all the way, but thinking—thinking.

"Some men fall on their feet like cats," he thought; "our big, brown, blundering friend, the Indian colonel, appears to be one of them. So mamma is reconciled, and our angel wife has gone to Glen Gower—the ancestral home, no doubt. Well, *mon ami*, I shall go to the ancestral home, likewise, and I think it extremely likely I shall hear something from pretty Eleanor I want very much to hear. She was a soft-headed, soft-hearted, sentimental little simpleton in the days gone by; as insipid as a mug of milk and water, and no doubt

I shall find her still unchanged. If my spirited Adelia hears of her good fortune, my spirited Adelia will be pretty safe to make known her whereabouts and necessities, and share that good fortune. And let me once cross her path—let me meet her face to face, and if ever woman had reason to curse the hour of her birth, Adelia Lyon shall curse hers. I have come all the way from Spain to hunt her down, and when the merciless avenger crosses her path, then let her beware!”

CHAPTER X.

FACE TO FACE.

It was the afternoon of the first of September—a glowing, sunlit afternoon, the air opaque with amber mist, as though the radiant arch rained impalpable gold dust, and Glen Gower was out in its brightest and best.

Gorgeous autumn flowers bloomed brilliant in the long, sunny pleasaunce; the gold-fish flashed in their crystal ponds like moving diamonds; and the fountains sparkled, and the trees waved, and the birds sung, and all was sunshine and jubilation; for, before the glorious sun set, the long-lost heir—the last of the Varnecks—would stand once more in his native halls.

Up in her own room the expectant bride awaited her bridegroom, robed in spotless white. But the face that gleamed on Eleanor Varneck from out the lofty mirror was whiter than the dress she wore—more rigid than marble. The great, dark eyes shone with somber luster, and the dusky circles beneath them told of sleepless nights and anxious days.

The rich, black hair formed a queenly crown around the stately head, and a cluster of white water-lilies, nestling in the foamy lace of her corsage, formed her only ornament.

“She was fond of white, and wore it oftener than anything else,” she thought. “I will do my best; I will struggle to the bitter end. If the worst comes, there is death. Oh, great Heaven! what a lost and guilty wretch I am! How will I ever dare to die when my time comes?”

She covered her white face with both hands, and slid down on her knees, lying against the marble dressing-table as if she never cared to rise again.

“Oh!” she thought, with a dreary groan, “what happy women there are in the world, loving and beloved, whose lives are fair, white pages for all the earth to read! And I, steeped to the very lips in crime—what a black and shameful record

lies behind me! And now I stand in my dead sister's place, and deceive a loving mother and a trusting husband. I wonder the ghost of Eleanor Lyon does not rise from the grave to destroy me!"

She lay there while the afternoon sun wore low, and the amber light deepened, and the western sky was one blaze of gold and crimson. When she lifted her head her face looked worn and haggard, and unutterably weary.

"The wretched play must be played out," she said, with a long, heavy sigh. "Now for more lies, more shameful deception! I must make madame see with my eyes, think with my thoughts; and the time has come. Gilbert Varneck will be here in an hour."

She left the chamber, glided to madame's, and took a low stool at her feet. And while the September sun dropped lower and lower in the radiant sky, the younger woman talked and the elder woman listened.

* * * * *

Through that golden haze, that was like a glimpse of the glory of heaven, drove two men in a gig from the railway station. Swelling fields and fragrant forests were on every hand, and Captain Dandin smoked his cigar and eyed the prospect, while Colonel Varneck drove along through a whirling cloud of dust.

Both men were very silent, the colonel too full of his intense happiness for words or smiles, and Captain Dandin very well content to be left to his own ruminations.

They came in sight of Glen Gower, gilded and glorified in the sunset—lawns and glades, and garden and avenue beautiful as summer and sunshine could make them, and far beyond, bounding the view, the luminous waters of the bay.

"This is home!" said Gilbert Varneck, his deep eyes filling with joy.

"And, by Jupiter Tonans, a home to sigh for, to die for!" cried the captain. "And you gave up all this for two black eyes and a pretty face!"

"Who told you she had black eyes?" said Colonel Varneck. "I never did."

"I took it for granted, then," replied the captain, coolly. "You fair men—not that you're over and above fair now, after eight years' exposure to a broiling tropic sun—always go mad for dusky eyes and tarry tresses. And, lo! by all the goddesses in Olympus, yonder she stands!"

Yes, there, radiant on the terrace, with all the crimson and golden glory of the sunset dazzling in her white robes, flashing

back in her great dark eyes and blue-black hair, stood Eleanor Varneck, making a luminous picture of herself against a background of dusky ivy and climbing roses.

She saw them come; she saw them stop; she saw the handsome, sun-browed soldier leap out, with a face glorified by joy, and come toward her, and she never stirred.

In that supreme crisis of her life she stood as still and rigid as the stone pillar which she grasped, deathly white, waiting for her doom.

“Eleanor!”

He could utter but the name; his voice choked; but two strong arms caught her in their grasp, strained her to a throbbing heart with a strain that seemed to merge her into itself.

“My wife, my wife! my love, my darling!”

And then the strong voice choked once more, and a rain of passionate, husbandly kisses spoke more eloquently than words.

She never moved, she never spoke—if her life had depended upon it she could not. She returned no caress; she spoke no welcoming word; she lay cold and lifeless as marble in his embrace.

“Eleanor!” he cried, at last, “have you no word of love, or welcome, or forgiveness? Have I sinned beyond pardon? My bride! my wife! my love! look up and speak to me!”

She lifted her head slowly and looked full in the flushed, impassioned face. What was there in that pale, fixed look, in those weird, black eyes, that made him recoil as if a hand of iron had stricken him back?

“Eleanor!” he cried, in a loud, wild voice of affright, “is this really you?”

And then the woman was roused; that eloquent cry awoke all the craft and cunning in her treacherous soul.

“Gilbert, my darling! my husband! have ten years changed me so much as that?”

He looked at her, the trouble, the fright, not quite out of his face yet.

“The voice is the same; but for one instant, Eleanor, as you looked at me, I did not know you. Changed? Yes, surely! Strangely, wonderfully changed! And yet the same! Oh, thank God, my darling, that I hold you in my arms once more!”

“And our mother, Gilbert. See—she is here!”

Yes, at his elbow. She gave a great cry of motherly joy, and fell into the open arms.

Her claim was the first and most sacred.

“Welcome home, Gilbert, my son, my son!”

He kissed the tear-wet face again and again.

"You, at least, have not changed, mother. A few more white hairs, maybe, but my own handsome, stately mamma, all the same. And I—you would hardly know the big, sun-burned soldier, would you?"

"I would know you anywhere, my darling boy. And look, here is a third claimant for your kisses—Miss Varneck, of Glen Gower."

A rosy little damsel, all white muslin, and pink ribbons, and brown ringlets, hung shyly back, smiling and blushing. Madame drew her proudly forward.

"Look, Gilbert; my granddaughter."

"Ah! I don't know this young lady," the Indian colonel said. "Come here, my little one, and give papa a kiss. By Jove! I don't recognize myself under my new distinction. Who is she like, Eleanor? Not a look of you, and not a look of the Varnecks. How is that?"

"I can not pretend to say. A great many think she is like the Varnecks."

"I don't see it, then. How old are you, dear?"

"Nine years—papa!"

She hesitated a little over the name. A father was as great a novelty in Miss Eudora's experience as a daughter was in his. But she repeated her lesson, and the tall colonel laughed.

"Shall we go in, mother? I feel so bewildered by all these new sensations that I hardly know whether I am on my head or my heels. The whole affair is like a chapter in a novel, or an act of a play."

"Let us go in," said madame, gravely. "I have something of importance to say to you, Gilbert."

She led the way. He drew his wife's arm through his, took his little girl by the hand, and followed her.

The old servants were all drawn up in array, in the hall, and a welcome cheer rose at sight of their beloved young master.

Colonel Varneck stopped to shake hands with the dusky friends of his boyhood, and proceeded to his mother's dressing-room.

"Let Dora remain, Gilbert; it is not necessary she should enter."

Little Dora bounded off, and Gilbert Varneck, wondering somewhat, entered and closed the door. He kept his wife beside him, his arm encircling her waist.

"Well, mother mine, I await your commands."

She laid both hands on his shoulders, and looked smilingly in his eyes.

"Gilbert, I want you to celebrate this happy day by a new marriage."

"Eh?" cried the colonel, with a blank stare. "A new marriage? Why, mother, has polygamy been introduced into Maryland, and has Lady Hortense Eddersdale come over from England to take possession of me by force? Eleanor, what do you say to this?"

"It is Eleanor's proposal," said Mme. Varneck. "Her conscience is uneasy about the past marriage. She thinks because contracted by you under an assumed name that it is not valid—that Eudora's claim as your heiress may, by and by, come to be disputed on this ground. In short, she wishes to be married to Gilbert Varneck as she was ten years ago to Launcelot Lauriston."

Colonel Varneck broke into a loud laugh, and tried to look at his wife, but she had hidden her face on his shoulder and refused to lift it.

"My foolish Nelly! What a baby you are! My dear girl, set your mind at rest; no one will ever dispute the legality of your marriage or the legitimacy of your daughter."

"But, Gilbert, she wishes it so much—she has conscientious scruples. Respect them."

"Oh, by all means!" exclaimed the colonel, jovially. "I'll marry her a dozen times over, if she likes! A wedding is the only thing wanting to complete the general jubilation. Send for the parson and let us be made happy out of hand."

"I have sent for him," his mother answered, gravely; "but pray, Gilbert, don't treat the matter in this spirit of levity. Mr. Hurst is to be implicitly trusted—I explained the whole matter to him in a note, and I expect him every instant."

"And you will be bride-maid, mother, and Dandin will be groomsmen! Oh, by the bye, where is Dandin? I forgot all about him. I must go and hunt him up at once."

"Of whom are you speaking, Gilbert?"

"Of my friend Captain Dandin, mother. He came over with me from England, and accompanied me here. He had a claim upon my confidence, for he saved my life on one occasion, and he knows all. Excuse me a moment while I go look him up."

Colonel Varneck found his friend in the garden. Left to himself by the impetuous Indian officer, the captain had sat

for a few moments staring at the white vision on the terrace, a fixed, petrified gazer.

"Heaven on earth!" was his mental ejaculation, "is that Eleanor Lyon or the other one?"

He sat there until they disappeared into the house; then he leaped from the carriage and began pacing excitedly round and round the fish-pond.

"I never thought of that," he said—"I never thought of that. Twelve years ago those two sisters were strikingly alike in height and complexion, eyes and hair, but there all resemblance ended. No one by any possibility could have mistaken one for the other. And now— Can ten years have transformed Eleanor into Adelia? No!" cried the captain, shrilly and sharply; "it is something worse than that—worse than I ever thought."

Round and round he went, almost dizzy with the intensity of his own thoughts. Suddenly he struck both hands sharply together.

"I have it!" he cried—"the birthmark on the arm—the 'Black Triangle,' as we used to call it. If it be as I suspect, yonder woman has three black moles, forming a triangle, on the inner part of her left arm above the wrist. If they be not there, it is all right—it is Eleanor. Ah! here comes the prodigal son in search of his Orestes! Now to see the fatted calf killed, and to get a peep at madame's pretty white arm before yonder bright sun goes down."

CHAPTER XI.

THE EMERALD SERPENT.¹

COLONEL VARNECK explained his wife's scruples to his friend, with laughing good humor, and Captain Dandin listened with grave and shrewd attention.

Seen by the light of his new suspicion, this circumstance took quite a different coloring to that it wore in the happy, unsuspecting mind of the young colonel. He laughed to himself—a sardonic, inward laugh.

"So," he thought, "Madame Adelia—for I know it is Adelia—insists upon the ceremony before starting. Everything is to be quite proper and decorous, and a wedding-ring and an ancient name is to make an honest woman of her. My lady grows particular with years—she was not quite so fastidious at sweet sixteen."

He linked his arm in that of his friend and turned with him toward the house.

"I give you joy, my colonel," he said, gayly. "Marry her again, of course; it would never do to refuse so small a favor to a lady—and to such a lady! I give you my word, I was perfectly dazzled! It is a Juno, it is a Cleopatra—an Eastern goddess! And here comes Monsieur l'Abbe to tie the Gordian knot. Behold the stove-pipe hat and the white choker!"

The Reverend Cyril Hurst rattled up in his gig and drew in beside the two men.

"Ten thousand welcomes back!" he cried, heartily, holding out his hand. "I knew you would turn up, sooner or later. And how you have changed, to be sure—bearded like a patriarch, and so big and brown! Madame has told me everything, and here I am, to marry our penitent prodigal to his own wife."

A servant came round to lead away his horse, and, talking volubly, Mr. Hurst accompanied them into the house. Colonel Varneck presented his companion and led the way into the drawing-room.

Madame alone was waiting there, her black dress exchanged for one of silver gray, and a big diamond pin, blazing like a sun, on her breast. She came forward with her usual stately grace to receive her son and his companions, welcomed Captain Dandin graciously to Glen Gower, and shook hands familiarly with the Reverend Cyril.

"The ceremony will take place immediately," she whispered. "Gilbert, Eleanor is waiting for you upstairs. Go lead her down. In fifteen minutes the dinner-bell will ring."

Colonel Varneck quitted the drawing-room with an amused smile on his face. He thought the whole proceeding silly and unnecessary, and rather got up for effect, but he was very willing to be the lion of the hour.

He found his wife in her room, robed for the sacrifice. The simple white muslin dress she had worn all the afternoon she still retained, but over it was thrown a veil of old point, that draped her from head to foot. Through its silvery shimmer the beautiful face looked deathly white.

"Fair as a lily and lovely as an angel!" Gilbert Varneck said, kissing her. "I expected to find you prematurely old and faded; and, lo! here you are, ten thousand times more beautiful than the pretty Eleanor Lyon of ten long years ago."

She clasped her hands around his arm and looked up in the handsome, happy face with strange, solemn earnestness.

"And you love me as well? Oh, Gilbert, tell me you love me as well as the girl-bride you wedded ten years back!"

"A hundred times better, my precious Nelly!" he answered, fervently—"a hundred thousand times better! Do you think those years of suffering and parting have gone for nothing? Do you think every hour of absence did not make you dearer? Do you think all you have suffered through me and for me has been in vain? And, then, you are regally beautiful now, Nelly. I left a pale little rosebud, and I find a radiant rose. Why, my darling, if you were a beggar maid and I were a King Cophetua, I would go mad for love of you, and make you my queen at first sight!"

Her face dropped on his breast; her white arms clasped him close.

"It will atone—it will atone!" she murmured. "Oh, Gilbert Varneck, I will love you—I do love you! I will be the truest, the faithfulest, the most loving wife man ever had! I will make you happy if woman can; heart and soul, I will be all yours. Come!"—she raised her head with a look of proud defiance, her black eyes blazing, her cheeks flushed—"they await us; let us go down."

He drew her arm within his and led her down the sweeping oaken stairs. Surely the hour of this woman's triumph had come! All she had plotted for and schemed for was hers; every deep-laid plan had succeeded. In ten minutes she would be the proud, and happy, and exultant wife of the richest and handsomest man in the State.

"And they say there is a Providence that watches over good people!" she cried, in her triumphant heart. "They say there is retribution for the wicked even in this life. Bah! the driveling babble of old women and hypocritical parsons! Where is the Providence of the Varnecks now? Where is the retribution for all the crimes of my life?"

"Here!"

It was the first word she heard as Gilbert Varneck threw open the drawing-room door, and the sound of the voice went through her heart like a bolt of ice.

She turned hastily around and saw a gentleman—a perfect stranger to her—talking animatedly to Mr. Hurst—a peculiarly ugly gentleman, with piercing dark eyes and no nose.

At their entrance the conversation ceased. The gentleman with the dark eyes retreated to a window, and the clergyman smilingly approached the bride and drew forth his book.

Madame rose and placed herself beside her daughter-in-law, and the colonel called:

"Come here, Dandin!"

Captain Dandin approached, and again the bride regarded

him with a long, troubled look. What did that voice—what did those piercing eyes recall?

Captain Dandin covertly saw that look, and smiled under the shadow of his beard.

“You are royally beautiful, madame,” he said to himself—“a mate for an emperor. But for all that I wouldn’t stand in Gilbert Varneck’s shoes this moment for a kingdom.”

He glanced furtively at the left arm. It was bare nearly to the shoulder, and glimmered like marble through the silvery veil. Just above the wrist it was clasped by a superb bracelet—a serpent with gleaming emerald eyes biting its own tail. The other arm was quite bare.

The ceremony began—finished, and Eleanor Lyon was again the wife of Gilbert Lauriston Varneck.

As they signed their names, Captain Dandin looked keenly at the bride’s signature. Her hand had shaken a little, but the clear, sloping Italian characters were beautifully formed. The bridegroom looked at it, too.

“Have you been taking writing lessons of late, Nelly?” he said. “This elegant chirography is not much like the round, funny little fist you used to write lang syne.”

Perhaps the bride did not hear the remark. She was being kissed and congratulated by mamma-in-law. She certainly did not reply.

Captain Dandin wrung the hand of his friend.

“To wish you happy with such a bride is superfluous,” he said, with a death’s-head smile. “Your life will be one long Elysium, no doubt; and yet, as it is the thing to do, I wish you every blessing that such a marriage deserves.”

He pronounced the last words in a singularly slow and distinct voice, looking full in his friend’s face.

But he saw the bride wheel suddenly round and stare at him, with blank consternation in every feature.

“Good Heaven!” she thought, “who is this horrible man?”

Her husband answered the question. He drew Dandin forward and presented him at once.

The captain bowed profoundly, and murmured an unintelligible something lost in the clang of the dinner-bell.

The little group adjourned at once to the dining-room, where the long table flashed and glittered under the great chandelier, lighted already, for the luminous dusk of the September evening had come.

The curtains were undrawn, and the windows stood wide open, and the lawn, and garden, and waving trees, under the

deep blue sky and tremulous stars, formed a picture of unutterable twilight beauty. They were a very gay little party—every one was in exuberant spirits; but Captain Dandin was the life and soul of them all.

He was more than brilliant—he flashed with delightful anecdotes, *bon mots*, happy sayings, vivid descriptions; he kept the whole party literally hanging on his lips. He never said a stupid thing and he never made a blunder. He was charming.

Mme. Varneck and Mr. Hurst listened in wonder and admiration and delight, and Colonel Varneck began to think he had never done justice to his friend's conversational powers before. As for Mrs. Gilbert Varneck, she listened like one in a dream.

"Where have I heard that voice? Where have I seen those eyes and that wicked, brilliant smile? Where have I met this man before?"

She could not answer the question, but from the first instant she had seen and heard him, a mortal dread of this stranger took possession of her, body and soul.

Little Dora was admitted to dessert, and the delightful captain took her on his knee and fraternized with her at once.

"Not in the least like papa or mamma," he said, "but fresh and sweet as a little moss-rose. And how old is our little Dora?"

He prattled to the child while the others conversed, and behold! there was little Dora lisping all the story of her childhood, her Lymeford home, and old Granny Croak. He had asked her no direct questions, but he got the whole history, and then she was gayly passed along to papa, and Captain Dandin was doing the charming to Dora's mamma.

Presently the ladies retired, and the gentlemen drew together over their wine. Captain Dandin drank freely of those rare old ruby and amber vintages; but his wit only flashed the brighter, his capital anecdotes only grew the more laughable and frequent, and the death's-head smile the more bright and incessant.

Colonel Varneck's wife was seated at the piano when they entered. She would have risen, but the captain crossed over at once.

"Pray don't!" he said. "Charm us with some delightful music, this night of all nights. You sing, I know. Do you sing old ballads? Do you sing 'Allan Percy'?"

It was a song she had been wont to sing for Gerald Rosslyn in the days gone by—a song she had never sung since. Her

hands dropped heavily on the keys, and the icy terror of this man clutched her heart like a mailed hand.

"You sing it, I am sure. It is a favorite of mine—always was. May I entreat you to favor me?"

She dared not refuse. She played and sung the song mechanically, and all the time she felt the sinister black eyes piercing her very soul.

"Ah, that is exquisite! I was sure you sung it! Ten thousand pardons—but may I look at your bracelet?"

There was something in the man's horrible vivacity—in the airy freedom of his manner—that made her yield involuntarily, in spite of his impertinence. He took the bracelet, touching it daintily, and examined the design.

"So very pretty! Now, I have a daughter in Spain, and I should like to send her one like this. She is so fond of ornaments, dear child! I am going to New York to-morrow, and I will have a duplicate made. Is it asking too much, or might I entreat you to unclasp it, and let me examine it more closely?"

The dreadful spell of the man's power was upon her; again she obeyed mechanically. He took it, scrutinized it closely, admired it enthusiastically, and turned to reclasp it with officious gallantry.

"An exquisite ornament, and almost fitted for such an arm. Permit me to reclasp it, and a million thanks, dear lady, for your gracious condescension. My little Fairy shall be made happy by just such another, and to you she will owe it!"

He reclasped the bracelet. There, on the beautiful arm, right above the wrist, was the Black Triangle—the three little black moles—close together. The bracelet hid them completely.

"And here comes *mon mari*!" exclaimed the gay captain, as Gilbert Varneck approached, "and I must monopolize madame no longer. Thrice blessed colonel, I resign in your favor!"

The fire of his deadly black eyes was at its fiercest—the light of his sinister smile was at its brightest. Gilbert Varneck's wife leaned heavily against the piano, cold and rigid as death, with awful, unutterable fear. And Captain Dandin sauntered over to the window and looked out at the silvery beauty of the starlit night.

"You're a wonderful woman, my handsome Adelia! I could almost have it in me to fall in love with you once more, only it is so devilish hard to rekindle dead ashes. You're a

handsome woman, and a cleverer woman than I ever gave you credit for; and you have played your little game with a consummate skill and adroitness that might have done honor to Captain Dandin himself. But handsome as you are and clever as you are, you are yet no match for me! You may deceive these honest, blundering burghers, these big, stupid Indian colonels, these blue-blooded mammas, but I hold you in the hollow of my hand. You're mine, body and soul, Mrs. Gilbert Varneck, and I'll crush you! I'll crush you! I'll crush you!"

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN DANDIN TURNS PHILANTHROPIST.

CAPTAIN DANDIN left Glen Gower, but not the day after the wedding. He lingered a week or two in those pleasant pastures, ingratiating himself with madame and her guests, smoking his cigar among the tulips and dahlias, and lounging on the velvet sofas and in the deep window-seats, and talking brilliantly right and left. He was never a bore. When most delightful, when most fascinating, he stole away and "left his character behind him," and those who remained vied with each other in singing pæans to the charming, noseless captain. Colonel Varneck began to discover that he had caged a domestic treasure. Mrs. Colonel Varneck alone disliked and distrusted him, and some inward dread, she knew not what, made her keep that dislike and distrust jealously to herself.

It was the evening before his departure North, and there was a dinner-party at the house. On that occasion the tiger showed the first glimpse of its claws outside their velvet sheath. The conversation turned upon a recent occurrence in Baltimore. A girl had tried to poison a recreant lover and failed.

"Bah!" Captain Dandin said, "she was a fool. Fools invariably fail. And poison, too—the weapon of the weakest-witted of fools! Of all the contemptible things in this world, failure in those sort of affairs is the most contemptible. Now, I remember an instance where a girl avenged her wrongs in the most open and daring manner, and afterward eluded the vigilance of all the detectives in New York. It was ten years ago."

"Let us hear it, Dandin," said the colonel.

"It was ten years ago," said Captain Dandin, leisurely trifling with his napkin, "and the course of my wandering life chanced to bring me to New York at the time. I made the acquaintance of a young fellow, an artist by profession,

poor as a church mouse, and as handsome as a Greek god. An unprincipled young scoundrel, no doubt, mauger his beauty, an infidel as to his principles, a cynic, a sneerer, a Voltairean. He induced a very pretty young girl to elope with him—only fifteen, poor child, and the eldest daughter of a clergyman. He taught her his own poisonous doctrines, his contempt for that social prejudice called matrimony. She went with him, in a word, and spent two years wandering with him over the country, starving one day and living in luxury the next. At the end of that time a child was born."

Captain Dandin made a pause here to take a sip from his wine-glass, then proceeded:

"I told you he was an unprincipled scoundrel. Long before the expiration of these two years he was heartily tired of his luckless companion. He left her in the extremity of her illness—left her in the loneliest of country farm-houses, to die, as he thought, as he hoped. He fled to New York, leaving no clew behind him as to his whereabouts. There he formed the acquaintance of a young lady, an heiress and belle, romantic and silly to an extraordinary degree. He painted her portrait, and she fell madly in love with him. My Voltairean friend was not the sort of person to let such a chance slip. His contempt for marriage did not extend to wealthy heiresses. He proposed, was accepted, and the wedding-day was fixed."

Captain Dandin raised his glass again, but over it he glanced at Mrs. Gilbert Varneck. She sat directly opposite him, beside her husband, and dead and in her coffin she would never look whiter than she did then.

"And now comes the romantic and tragic part of my story. The poor, deserted girl, left to her fate, did not die. She recovered to swear deadly vengeance against her betrayer. She came to New York; with the subtle instinct of woman's hatred, she hunted him down. Some women there are who pine away and die, silent and voiceless, of neglect. She was of a fiercer sort—one of your flashing-eyed, raven-haired heroines, who are ready to cut your throat with the carving-knife, or walk over burning plowshares for your sake, according as you use them. She discovered the night appointed for the marriage, and when the night came she was there."

There was another breathless pause. Every one was absorbed in the narrative now.

"She was there, crouching outside the window, with a loaded pistol," pursued the narrator, slowly. "The bridal party entered the drawing-room, and stood before the minister of God to be made man and wife. The marriage ceremony

concluded, the happy bridegroom turned to salute the blushing bride. 'There is many a slip;' there was a flash, a report—the bridegroom fell forward, shot through the head. Oh, you must all have read the account! The unhappy young man's name was Gerald Rosslyn."

He paused, and sipped with relish at his wine. But over his glass he looked once more at the handsome face of Gilbert Varneck's wife. Good Heaven! how ghastly, how awfully corpse-like that rigid face was!

"Well," said the colonel, "and what became of the still more unfortunate girl?"

"That is the best of it. She baffled them all, by Jove, and escaped! All the detectives in New York were on the track of the murderer, but they never suspected the young woman who lay raving madly in the delirium of a brain fever in one of the hospitals.

"When discovered, it was too late. She had quitted it, cured, and, under an assumed name, made herself thin air. I have not the slightest doubt but she is alive and well at this present moment, and the wife, perhaps, of a wealthy man. She was just the sort of woman to rise fiercely and defy fate, and achieve for herself a rich marriage. But the friends of Gerald Rosslyn are still on her trail, and, let her be wedded to the highest and mightiest in the land, if they ever find her, they'll hang that woman as high as Haman!"

The climax of the captain's story was suddenly spoiled, for old Mme. Varneck rose from her chair with a cry.

"Eleanor!" she screamed. "Gilbert, look at your wife!"

The cry was not an instant too soon. Eleanor Varneck fell heavily on her husband's breast in a dead swoon.

All was commotion. It was the captain's horrible story—it was the heat—it was a sudden spasm—each one had his own conjecture.

In the midst of it all, Colonel Varneck carried her upstairs to her chamber, and left her in charge of his mother and Susie.

Captain Dandin remained two days longer at Glen Gower, out of pure politeness. Mrs. Varneck was too ill to leave her chamber. She had been wild and hysterical ever since the dinner-party—not confined to her bed, but too poorly to appear down-stairs.

On the third day she was reported much better, and on the third day Captain Dandin left for the North. His friend, the colonel, rode with him to the station and saw him off.

"You will not leave the country without visiting us again,"

the colonel said, hospitably; "and when you return your stay must be longer than it has been on this occasion."

"Surely, my colonel," the captain cried, vivaciously, "I have no other intention. Glen Gower is a little heaven below, and, lest I should never see the big heaven above, I will make the most of my entrance into the terrestrial paradise. Adieu, *mon ami*, and *au revoir*! Take good care of your charming wife!"

As the "resonant steam eagle" whirled the gallant captain far from "My Maryland," his thoughts, like the thoughts of a true friend, were ever backward with those he left.

"'There is a destiny which shapes our ends,' so the immortal William says, and destiny has managed my little game for me, on this occasion, most wonderfully. To think that I should come all the way from Spain to find this woman—prepared to hunt high and low, to spend money like water, to be subtle as a serpent and cunning as a fox, and *voilà*! I go to the ancestral home, with my big brown colonel, and find my bird before me! If I were a good man, I should say it was the work of Providence; not being a good man, I must conclude that his Satanic Majesty, for once in a way, is disposed to favor his own. Ah, she's a wonderful woman! With her for my wife, I might defy the world! As it is, I am her foe to the death. And *la petite*, too—who is the little girl? Has old Granny Croak tricked the trickster, after all? I must investigate."

Captain Dandin reached New York, arranged his business there, and proceeded to Boston. The morning bustle of the busy city was just beginning as the noseless captain stepped from the depot, valise in hand.

"Morning 'Herald,' sir? 'Journal,' sir? Carry your valise, sir?"

A volley of such shrill cries crackled round his ears, and a dozen eager little urchins pressed forward.

"Out of my way, you swarm of locusts!" cried the captain. "I don't want you. Yes, I do! Here, my man, let me have the 'Herald,' and follow me to the Revere with this."

He flung his valise to the nearest, and the urchin pounced upon it in triumph.

"Lauriston is always in luck where there's a quarter to be made," one of the boys said, discontentedly. "Come on, fellows! 'Journal,' sir? Mornin' 'Herald'?"

The keen ear of the captain, which nothing missed, caught at the name directly.

“Lauriston!” he thought. “That’s an uncommon name, and a very familiar one, of late. I didn’t expect to meet with it in a newsboy.”

He turned to look at his little follower for the first time, and, in looking, the captain’s glittering eyes opened to their widest.

“Thousand thunders! My friend the big brown colonel in little! Now, what in the name of all that’s astounding, does this go mean? Halloo, my lad! how do they call you?”

“Sir?” cried the boy, brightly.

He was a pretty little fellow of nine or ten, with big, blue, Saxon eyes, a frank, fair face, and curling, bright-brown hair.

“What’s your name, my son?”

“Launce Lauriston, sir.”

“Hey!” cried Captain Dandin; and in the middle of the crowded street he came to a dead lock, absolutely petrified.

“Yes, sir,” said the boy, looking surprised, “Launcelot Lauriston, sir—Launce, for short.”

“*Sacre bleu!*” exclaimed Captain Dandin, bursting into French, “as-tounding! Launcelot Lauriston! and the living image of my colonel! What, in the fiend’s name, does this mean?”

The bright blue eyes of the boy were fixed rather alarmedly upon the gentleman without the nose. Master Launce Lauriston was evidently beginning to think that he had got hold of a madman.

But the cool captain was not one to lose his *sang-froid* for long; a second, and he was pacing vigorously along to his hotel, with his little henchman behind him.

“‘Here’s a staggerer!’ in the language of the immortal Dick Swiveller,” thought the captain. “What mare’s nest have I hit upon now? Am I destined to make another overwhelming discovery? This boy’s paternity is written plainly in his face. Little Dora is not the colonel’s child, and somewhere, in the scheme of the universe, a child of his should exist. Now, what if my blue-eyed little newsboy turns out to be the heir of Glen Gower? By Jupiter Olympus, my fortune’s made!”

They reached the hotel. The captain obtained a room, and ordered the boy to follow him up with the valise.

He had obeyed, doffing his cap, and staring at the grandeur about him with wide, admiring eyes.

“Come in and shut the door,” said the captain. “Now sit down. How is it such a smart-looking little chap as you

can find nothing better to do than selling papers and carrying valises?"

Launce Lauriston shifted his cap, looking uneasily at the gentleman.

"I go to school, sir," he said.

"Oh, you do, do you? And sell the papers between whiles. How long have you lived in Boston?"

"Most all my life, sir—ever since I was that high," holding his hand about six inches from the carpet.

"You weren't born here, then?"

"No, sir. I was born in New York."

"Father and mother alive?"

"Mother is, sir."

"And your father—dead, eh?"

"I don't know, sir. He's been gone a long time. Mother thinks he must be dead. He went away before I was born."

"Deserted your mother, did he? A villain, no doubt."

"No, sir—oh, no! He was a good man and a gentleman, but we were very poor—at least father and mother were—and so he went away in a whaler. Perhaps he's drowned; mother never heard of him since."

"You're named after him, I take it?"

"Yes, sir. He called himself Launcelot Lauriston; but mother sometimes says it was not his real name."

"No? What, then, was?"

"She doesn't know, sir. He kept it a secret. He was a gentleman, and he offended his friends by marrying mother."

"Do you know your mother's maiden name, my lad?"

"Yes, sir. Eleanor Lyon."

There was a moment's pause. Even the stoical captain was almost stunned.

"You are very poor—you and your mother?" he said, after a pause.

"Yes, sir; but not so poor as we have been. Mother gets plenty of sewing now, and I do odd jobs, and sell papers morning and evening."

"You're a little trump!" said Captain Dandin, patting the curly head; "and I've taken a great fancy to you, Master Launcelot Lauriston. We must see if we can not make a man of you, and help your good mother along. What's your address?"

The lad gave it readily, with the frank confidence of childhood.

The captain took it carefully down.

"Tell your mother that a gentleman—here's my card—has

taken a fancy to your bright face, and is going to give you a rise in the world. Tell her I will call this evening at eight, and have a talk to her about you. Now run off; I must not keep you late for school."

He pressed a bright gold eagle into the boy's palm and held open the door.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed little Launce, in wonder and delight.

"All right, my man! Run along. Look out for me at eight this evening. I don't believe we will let you sell any more papers."

"Thank you, sir!" his whole face beaming as he darted off. "Oh, what ever will mother say?"

Captain Dandin, left alone, paced up and down the room, with a darkly brooding face.

"Great Heaven!" he thought, "what a wretch! what a monster! what a devil incarnate that woman is! Talk of Jezebel—talk of Lucretia Borgia—talk of all the fiends in female shape that ever disgraced humanity! Where will you find a greater fiend than this woman? Murderess, adventuress, liar, I knew her to be; but this—this last most horrible discovery of all! Her sister—Gilbert Varneck's lawful wife—alive and well, and she usurping her place! Why, burning at the stake—tearing to pieces with red-hot pincers—would be all too merciful for her. But I'll wreak double, treble, four-fold vengeance upon her; I'll wring the life-blood out of her, drop by drop. The mercy she has meted to others shall be measured back to her with compound interest."

Captain Dandin descended to breakfast, then hastened about the business which had brought him to Boston.

He was agent for a Spanish commercial house, and spent a rather busy day. The dusk of the September evening was falling over the city as he left the hotel and took his way to the North End.

It was a clouded, overcast evening, with a chill, easterly wind and a slow, penetrating rain. The captain shivered in his loose overcoat, hailed a hack, and was rapidly driven to his destination—a shabby street in a shabby quarter; and his number brought him to a shabby tenement house.

The city clocks were chiming eight, and the rain began to fall fast and heavily as he got out and told the hackman to wait.

Inquiring for Mrs. Lauriston, he was shown up a flight of dark stairs and to a door on the right. He knocked, and it was opened at once by the boy Launcelot.

"I knew you would come!" the boy exclaimed, delightedly.

“Mother thought you might forget, but I knew better. Come right in; mother’s here. Mother, here’s the gentleman!”

Standing that one instant on the threshold, Captain Dandin’s keen blue eyes took in the whole picture.

A lamp burned on the pine table under the window; a work-basket, piled high with muslin fabrics, stood beside it. The floor was daintily white, covered in places by rag mats; the four painted chairs, the cheap rocker, the little cook-stove, the few books on shelves, the dresser with its common delf, the two or three cheap pictures on the walls—all was daintily pure and neat.

A door opposite that by which he stood led into a tiny bedroom, and, standing on the threshold, he saw a tall, slender lady with a pale, calm face and large, dark eyes—Colonel Varneck of Glen Gower’s long-lost wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAPTAIN DANDIN’S GOOD WORKS.

THERE was a momentary pause while the lady and gentleman regarded each other—only momentary; then the cool captain took the initiative in his usual easy manner. Advancing, hat in hand, he bowed with frank courtesy.

“Mrs. Lauriston, I know. Permit me—Captain Dandin.”

“Captain Dandin is very welcome. Pray, walk in and take a seat.”

But Mrs. Lauriston’s tone was decidedly cool. She advanced and took a chair herself, her manner perfectly polite but frigid. How pale and care-worn the beautiful face looked! all the paler for contrast with her mourning-dress and dead-black hair.

Captain Dandin understood the coolness at once. The cruel world had long ago taught Gilbert Varneck’s forsaken wife the bitter lesson of distrust. If strange gentlemen throw gold eagles to newsboys, and catechise them, and take a violent interest in them at first sight, and officiously visit them at their homes, these strange gentlemen are to be suspected of some hidden, sinister design in the background.

It is only on the stage men fling their purses in the lap of honest poverty out of pure benevolence; in real life they are apt to demand from honest poverty an equivalent for every centime.

Mrs. Lauriston was fully aware of all her bright-faced boy’s attractions—no one better; but she did doubt a little this

violent fancy the man had taken to him at first sight. Besides, if the truth must be told, those glittering black eyes of the captain's were sinister, and his brilliant smile sardonic; and the loss of his nose had not a tendency to prepossess mankind the more in his favor.

"You will pardon this visit, madame," the captain said, setting himself resolutely to combat that mistrust, "and you must believe me when I tell you I came here out of pure interest in your boy. You doubt my motives, I can see. Dear lady, why deny it, since it is perfectly natural and right? I am an eccentric man, no doubt—a creature of impulse; and it is not the first time the interesting countenance of some little street boy or girl has caused me to step out of the even tenor of my way to aid them. Early in life I, too, dear lady, was cast, alone and friendless, upon the world. Ah, what a long and bitter battle it was! Shall I ever forget it, or shall I ever forget to assist those similarly placed? A thousand times, no! And there is the making of a noble man, a great man, in your son, madame. I say it, though he hears me. And shall I not assist that noble nature to assert itself? Shall a conventional scruple hold me back? No, no! I am not a wealthy man, but I am beyond the power of want. I am a lonely man, with but few interests in life—shall I, therefore, neglect the highest and grandest of all human interests—the aiding my fellow-creatures? Once more, no!"

Mrs. Lauriston listened to his rapid speech in bewilderment and doubt. Her face lighted at the praise of her son, and her hand dropped caressingly on the clustering chestnut curls.

"Launce is a good boy," she said, "a very good boy, and his mother's greatest comfort."

"I am sure of it, and I am also sure his mother will not stand in the way of his advancement. If I find an opportunity of benefiting him, you will allow him to avail himself of that opportunity?"

"I will consent to nothing that separates me from him," Mrs. Lauriston answered, firmly. "He is all I have left—I will not part from him."

"Nor am I a monster to ask you to do it. No, no; we will manage better than that. Let me turn the matter over for two or three days; before the end of that period we will come to some decision. All I stipulate for is that you will not stand in the way of his advancement."

"It is scarcely likely, sir. I am his mother."

"And wet mothers, and the fondest of mothers, often fool-

ishly stand in the way of their children's advancement. Have you any objection to quit Boston, madame?"

Mrs. Lauriston looked at him again in surprise and doubt.

"Leave Boston?" she repeated. "I have no objection. But why should I leave Boston?"

"Because you might find an opportunity to establish yourself in some small business in a country village—a fancy store or something of the kind—much more easily than in the overcrowded city. And it would be better for the boy. Have you any objection to the country?"

"On the contrary, I infinitely prefer the country."

"And a variety store—a fancy store—would meet your views? It would be easier and more remunerative, I fancy, than your present employment," with a glance at the basket of muslin.

"There can be no question as to my preferring it. But for me to establish myself in a store of any kind is simply an impossibility."

"Perhaps—but not to me. With your permission I propose to do it."

"But, sir—"

"Dear lady, not a word—not one, I beg. It is entirely for the boy's sake. It is a loan to him, to be repaid with interest in the time to come. We must make a man of him. My little hero, what shall we make of you?"

"A doctor, sir!" cried Launcelot, with bright eagerness. "I want to be a doctor; don't I, mother?"

"Then a doctor it shall be! Doctor Lauriston sounds very well indeed. We have your permission, of course, dear madame? Ah! I foresee our boy is going to be one of the first physicians of the day!"

"But, really, Captain Dandin," exclaimed Mrs. Lauriston, bewildered by the energetic rapidity and decision of her visitor, "this is too much! You overwhelm me. Consider, we are perfect strangers to you. What claim have we upon you, that you should befriend us like this?"

"The claim of common humanity, dear lady—a claim to which my ears, my heart, my purse are ever open. Ah! cast away these doubts. Believe, for once, in disinterested generosity. Look, then, dear lady—I am from Spain; it is my home; my daughter is there, no older than this brave boy; and to Spain I return in a few short weeks. Who knows that I may ever return? Permit me to make two hearts happy ere I go. Permit me to place this boy where the good God in-

tended him to be placed. Remember me in your prayers; I ask no more."

Captain Dandin paused; emotion choked him.

Mrs. Lauriston looked and felt remorseful and ashamed. She held out her hand to her guest.

"Forgive me, sir, and accept my heartfelt thanks. I am so little used to kindness that I do not recognize it when we meet. My life has been a very hard and sorrowful one. I think my heart would have broken long ago if it were not for my boy."

"He told me," the captain said, gently, "your husband deserted you."

"That is hardly the word, sir. It was no willful desertion. We were very poor—miserably poor—and all he did, my poor darling, was for the best. He loved me truly and well. The parting was as hard upon him as upon me."

"And that is many years ago?"

"Over nine years ago, sir? Before my son's birth."

"And you have never heard of him since?"

"Never once—not a word, not a line. He is dead, I know. If he were alive, my husband would have returned to me ere this."

"Then you believe in him and trust him still, in spite of years of silence and parting?"

"As I believe in Heaven, sir! Nothing on this earth could shake my faith in my lost darling."

Captain Dandin looked at the noble, beautiful face, all aglow with woman's deepest, purest love.

"He called her his angel," he thought. "He was right. Oh, Gilbert Varneck, what you have lost!"

"He left you in New York," he said; "so your boy told me. If he ever returned it is there he would seek you."

Mrs. Lauriston shook her head.

"I have ceased to hope. My Launcelot is dead. If he had lived to return, the ends of the earth would not keep us apart. He would have found me. No, I will never meet my lost husband until we meet in heaven."

There was another pause. A few quiet tears fell. Captain Dandin's silence respected them.

"You must have found it a hard struggle with poverty, alone and ill, in that vast wilderness of stone and brick, with a helpless babe upon your hands. But you had your own friends—your relatives—no doubt?"

"No, sir; I was quite alone. One sister I had, but she was worse than dead to me. And yet, once I wrote to her. I had

obtained a clew to her whereabouts; she was working as a seamstress in the country, and doing very well. My boy was four years old then. I had fallen ill of typhus fever, and was pronounced incurable in the hospital. Launce was taken to an orphan asylum. Dying, as I thought, I wrote to Adelia; I begged her to come for my boy, to supply my place to him. I told her my whole sad story. I inclosed my husband's picture, my wedding-ring, my marriage certificate. Sir, I never received an answer, and I did not die. Contrary to every one's opinion, I recovered; and how bitterly I have regretted the loss of my only treasures is known but to Heaven and myself."

"You say you told your sister your story," said the captain, thoughtfully. "Then she did not know it before?"

"I don't know. A year before I married she fled from home; we never met after. It was a dark and shameful story, hers, and she was as dead to us all. I never mentioned her name; my husband never knew of her existence."

Captain Dandin had heard all he wished to hear. The proofs the false wife had given, and which had hitherto puzzled him, were clear as day now. And Gilbert Varneck could not suspect the woman he had wedded at Glen Gower, since he had never known his wife had had a sister. He had heard all he wanted to hear, and he pulled out his watch.

"It grows late. It is time I departed." He arose as he spoke. "Dear lady, you will trust me? You will let me help our Launcelot if I can?"

"Sir, your goodness is overpowering. Whatever you can do for my beloved boy I accept with deepest thanks."

"Then within a week expect me again. I am a man of rapidity—a man of action. In a week I will have settled my plans. Until then, madame, adieu! Until then, my little hero, farewell!"

He shook hands with the mother, patted the lad's curly head, and was gone like a flash. His cab was still waiting; he sprang in, gave the order, "The Revere," and was whirled away.

The rain beat tempestuously against the glass; the easterly wind Bostonians dread so much whistled shrilly up and down the empty streets.

Captain Dandin laughed softly to himself in the darkness—his most sardonic laugh.

"So!" he said; "that little game is won! It is a drawn battle between us, my tall, fascinating Mrs. Varneck; but I think the clever captain will come off conqueror. That pale, patient face, so calm, so earnest, so holy in its wifely trust

and motherly love! And the same mother bore those two women; the same breast nourished them—a tigress and a dove. And a bright, hopeful lad, too! Gilbert Varneck in miniature—his paternity written in every feature of his face. One might aid those two for the sake of aiding them. My faith! I hardly know myself in my new character of benefactor of the human species.”

And while the cynical captain rattled home in his cab, Mrs. Lauriston knelt with her boy in her humble room, thanking the Merciful Giver of all good gifts, and praying for guidance in her future course.

The week passed very slowly to the lonely seamstress and her son. With every passing day the new hope grew upon her, and the longing for Captain Dandin’s return became intense. But he did not disappoint her. On the last day of the week he appeared.

“All is well, dear lady!” he broke out, enthusiastically, kissing her hand, “and as we most wished it to be. The home is secured, the store waiting, the country and the sad sea waves all in the bargain. Dear lady, do you know Silver Shore?”

“I have heard of it. A watering-place five-and-twenty miles from the city.”

“Very little of a watering-place as yet—but a paradise on earth. Lovely beach, boundless sea, romantic caves and islands, cool, dark woods, picturesque village—Rasselas’s Happy Valley! There, you have it!”

He flourished both hands with an odd, foreign gesture, as though he threw the village at her. In the midst of her solicitude Mrs. Lauriston could not forbear laughing.

“Well, sir?” she said.

“It is well, madame—very well! The cottage is secured—such a cottage! Climbing roses, green blinds, cabbage garden, and the fancy store adjoining. The late lady—the late proprietress—has gone and got married; consequently, I buy out the store, the business, the cottage, the good-will of all, at once. There, madame, it awaits you and your boy. Little doctor, accept the deed.”

He handed the boy a parchment with his customary flourish, and little Launce took it as a matter of course.

“But, Captain Dandin,” Mrs. Lauriston interposed, “all this must have cost you so much. And we—ah! I fear it will be a long time—”

“Dear lady, not a word! It cost but a trifle—a mere song—nothing at all! And Doctor Lauriston will repay me with

interest when Doctor Lauriston exists. There is a capital school there, a church—everything charming. Meantime, it waits. Will you move to-day?”

“To-day! Oh, I—”

“To-morrow, then—the day after? You must, dear lady! I want to see you safely established, delightfully settled, before I quit the State—before I quit the country. I may never return, you know. To-morrow, then—or the day after?”

“To-morrow, mother!” cried little Launcelot. “Oh, do—let us go at once! I never was in the country, and I never saw the sea, and I want to climb trees and pick berries, and row and ride and swim. Let us go to-morrow!”

“Let us go to-morrow,” nodded the captain—“to-morrow, madame—to-morrow!”

“Very well—to-morrow,” said Mrs. Lauriston, bewildered by the rapid pair. “I dare say I can be ready. What time are we to start?”

“Two-fifty train—Worcester depot. I’ll send a hack for you and meet you at the station. No need to fetch all these,” sweeping his arms around the room; “our rustic cottage is furnished ever so prettily—little parlor, little kitchen, little chambers, and little shop. Everything beautiful!”

“Very well, sir; I will endeavor to be ready. But permit me to thank—”

“No, no, no! and again and again, no! No thanks. Be ready when the carriage calls, and be happy in your new home! I ask no more. Until to-morrow—madame and little doctor—farewell!”

And the eccentric captain was out of the house like a shot.

To-morrow came—noon came—two o’clock—and the hack.

Mrs. Lauriston was quite prepared. She and her son entered the vehicle and were driven to the depot. There they found the brisk captain awaiting them with their tickets.

They took their places, the bell rang, the whistle sounded, the train rushed out into the open country, and the city—was behind them.

Mrs. Lauriston sat like one in a dream, dazed and hopelessly bewildered. She could not realize her good fortune. The days of fairy godmothers were past, and the black-eyed, noseless captain was not handsome enough even for a fairy godmother; and yet this adventure was very like a modern edition of Cinderella.

But Silver Shore was a reality—beautiful, rural Silver Shore, with its woods and saline breezes, its sunlit sea, its

rich green meadows, its straggling, picturesque street, its pretty white cottages, and its waving trees.

They reached it in the golden middle of the mellow September afternoon, and walked straight from the sandy little station to their own white cottage, with its climbing vines and modest little shop.

And still Mrs. Lauriston was in a delicious dream. She saw the captain open the door; she followed him through the tiny hall into the cozy little parlor, carpeted, curtained, and bright—into the snug kitchen, with its shining stove and shining tins—up into the cool, pure chambers (three, as small and as neat as bandboxes)—into the shop (her “Fancy Store”), its shelves and windows well filled—out into the cabbage garden beyond; and still the vague, delicious dream continued. It could not be real, such bliss as this.

The captain’s voluble chatter, Launce’s shouts of ecstasy sounded in her ear like the drowsy buzzing of the bees in the swinging roses.

“I will awake presently in my close, stuffy little Boston room to drudge along far into the night,” she thought. “This bright vision of country peace is only a heavenly dream.”

The captain was the best and busiest of men. He flung wide the closed shutters and let in golden floods of summer sunlight. He sent Launce for sticks to the woodshed and started a fire in the cook-stove, made him set on the tea-kettle, and insisted on Mrs. Lauriston taking off her things.

“And do the honors of your own house, dear lady!” he cried, cheerily. “I am going to stay for tea. Little doctor, I saw a grocery up the street. Run there and fetch us new bread and country butter, and sugar and tea and peaches and cream. Run!”

He thrust a note into his hand and sent him flying off.

Still in that dream, Mrs. Lauriston found the pantry and the dishes, spread the cloth, set the table, and made the tea when Launce returned laden with parcels.

They all sat down together to their first meal in the Arcadian cottage—and such a meal! When had the poor seamstress and newsboy eaten anything like it?

“And they asked me at the store, mother, if you were the new milliner from Boston, and I said yes; and if I was your son, and when you meant to open, and what was your name. And, mother, he said if you only did half as well as Miss Hobbs, you would make your fortune.”

It was a delightful first meal, with the bright sea spreading

away beyond the cabbage garden, and the swelling meadows, and the sweet country breeze faintly rustling the roses.

It was delightful, and the captain was loud in his regrets when, after tea, he looked at his watch and found it was time to go.

"It is Adam leaving Paradise," he said, pathetically, "and without Eve. Dear lady, I go—never to return, perhaps. Do not forget me, and farewell!"

She tried to rouse herself and say something appropriate, but that dream still held her, and her tongue was tied.

"But you will write to me—you will tell me always how you get on, and the little doctor? A letter to this address will always reach me. Once more, adieu! Remember Dandin and be happy."

He laid an envelope on the table, took Mrs. Lauriston's hand, kissed it, embraced the boy, and departed in his usual meteor-like fashion.

Little Launce lifted the envelope when he was out of sight, opened it, and uttered a wild shout; for, besides the address scrawled on the back, it contained bank-notes to the amount of two hundred dollars.

"Oh, mother, look at this—look at all this money! We are rich for life now!"

But Mrs. Lauriston could not reply. White and sick, she lay back in her chair, almost fainting.

"If it is a dream," the pale lips murmured, "oh, God, grant I may never awake!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A CALL ON GRANNY CROAK.

"I SOLD her for gold—I sold her! and she was my dead daughter's only child!"

The glory of the September sunset poured into the little room where the dying old woman lay, and kindled into supernatural radiance the shabby chairs and table and bed, and the withered, worn, old face.

Tossing restlessly among the pillows, she flung her arms wearily about and moaned her incoherent talk, half sleeping, half waking.

A young woman sat sewing by the bedside, with the level rays of the amber glory gilding her coal-black hair.

"My only child—my only child!" the old woman moaned; "and I sold her for gold! I promised her dead mother to take care of her always, and see how I kept my word!"

The young girl bent over her.

"Will you have a drink, Granny Croak?" she asked.

"Sold! sold! sold!" was Granny Croak's weary cry. "My little Dora—my dead daughter's only child!"

There was a rap at the door.

"The doctor again," muttered the girl, as she arose to open it. "He said she wouldn't wear the night through, and that he would come back."

But it was not the doctor. It was a gentleman the young person had never seen before—a tall, dark, gentleman with piercing black eyes and less the nose.

"Does Granny Croak live here?"

"Yes, sir—to-day she does; she may not to-morrow."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean she is dying."

"Dying?"

"Yes, sir. There she is. Look for yourself."

The nurse threw wide the door. Captain Dandin strode across the room and stood beside the dying woman's bed. The hot head still tossed; the restless arms still flung themselves about; the half-delirious tongue still babbled on:

"I sold her for gold! My pretty little Dora! I sold her to the veiled lady, and she was my dead daughter's only child!"

"What does she mean?" asked Captain Dandin, in surprise.

"Oh, she's a little out of her head this evening," the young nurse answered, coolly, "and she's rambling about a little girl, Dora Dalton, that used to live with her. She was her grandchild, I believe, and an orphan, and some lady adopted her. It weighs on granny now, it seems. She talks of nothing else."

"How long ago is this?"

"Not long—a month or two. Granny's never been herself since. She broke down a fortnight ago, and I came to nurse her. She may last till midnight—not longer. If you have anything to say to her you had better say it at once."

"I have a great deal to say to her; but if she is delirious, where is the use?"

"Oh, she is half asleep now. I will wake her up. Granny—Granny Croak, wake up! Here's a gentleman come to see you."

The dull eyes opened and went wandering aimlessly about.

"What is it, Susan?" she feebly asked.

"Some one to see you, granny—a strange gentleman. Here he is."

Granny Croak looked at him, stared a moment incredulously, gave a shrill cry, and seized his arm.

"It is the right one—it is the gentleman I want! You got the right one, and the lady came, as you told me she would, and I gave her Dora. Oh, tell me—tell me if you know anything of Dora?"

"Now, my good old Granny Croak, don't excite yourself—she is safe and well. As for you, my young lady," turning to the nurse, "have the goodness to step out a few minutes. I have a word or two for Madame Croak's private ear."

The nurse, Susan, got up with a face of stoical indifference and walked out of the room. Captain Dandin drew a chair close to the bedside and sat down.

"Now, my good old Granny Croak, don't excite yourself. It is not necessary, and in your present precarious state, highly dangerous. It is about your little Dora I have come. I saw her not a month ago, and she was safe and well, beautifully dressed, and happy as a queen. The lady thinks she is her own very child, and cares for her accordingly. You could not have done better for the little girl, and she is going to be a great heiress. And now I want you to tell me all about it."

"It was just as you said it would be," replied Granny Croak. "You came when the right one was about a year old, and you paid me—ah! you paid me down handsome, I'll say that for you—and you took her away. You said it was like the mother might come after it some day, and I was not to tell her about you, but to pass off some other child of the same age upon her as hers. Well, I waited, and nobody ever came. I had one little one and then another left with me, but people came and adopted them and carried them off; and, last of all, my daughter died in Jersey City, and left little Dora. She was a widow, my daughter, Ellen Dalton, and when she was buried I took little Dora. It was four years after you took Fairy, and Dora was three and a half years old. Well, sir, a little better nor two months ago didn't that lady come for her child!"

"Yes," said Captain Dandin. "Go on."

"You might ha' knocked me down with a feather," pursued the old woman. "I was that took aback I didn't know whether I was sitting or standing. She wanted her little girl, and she would pay me like a lady. Then I thought of Dora. I was getting old and must leave her soon, and she must go to service and work all her life. Why shouldn't I pass her

off on the lady as her own child? Dora was nearly a year younger, but she would never know that; and she hadn't such big black eyes and hair as Fairy; but she'd never seen Fairy from a baby, and children do change so. Sir, I did it! I called up Dora and told the lady she was her daughter. I don't think she believed me at first—I think she was mistrustful all through, but she took her. She gave me the money then, and she sent me more from New York. I have it all yet; I couldn't touch a cent of it. It seemed like blood-money—the price of my own flesh and blood!”

“Did the lady write you a letter from New York?”

“Just a few lines, sir—to say she sent me the money, and that she would send me no more.”

“Have you got that note?” asked Dandin.

“Yes, sir; it's locked up with my money.”

“Well, then, Granny Croak, see here: you must give me that note, and you must make a dying deposition, on oath, of this story. In return, I will tell you all the news of your granddaughter. You will agree to this? You will let me write out this story in the presence of witnesses, and you will sign it?”

“Will it do any harm to Dora?”

“Certainly not. It will do no harm to any one. Let us begin at once. Here, nurse, I say, halloo!”

The nurse reappeared.

“Get us pen and ink, and stay in the room. We will want some one else, too. Who can we get?”

“The doctor is at the door, sir.”

“Is he? Then I'll go and explain before he comes up.”

Captain Dandin darted from the room and waylaid the doctor in the passage. Ten minutes sufficed for his explanation; then both re-entered together. Pen, ink, and paper were placed upon the table. The captain drew it close to the bedside, sat down, and began rapidly to indite the dying woman's deposition.

He read it over aloud when finished, and the feeble old fingers of Granny Croak made their tottering mark on the paper. Then the unsigned note from New York was handed to him, and he folded both up carefully, sealed them, and placed them away in an inner pocket.

He had accomplished his mission. The toils were closing fast around Mrs. Gilbert Varneck.

Captain Dandin shared the nurse's vigil that night. As the midnight hour tolled from the steeples of Lyme-ford, the spirit of Granny Croak soared away from all things earthly.

Early next morning the first train bore the captain to Jersey City, the precious manuscript in his inside pocket. He breakfasted there and started for New York—the first stage of his journey back to Glen Gower.

“I hold you in the hollow of my hand now, my lady!” the captain said, with a diabolical inward laugh of triumph; “and I’ll crush you, body and soul—crush you in the filth under my feet as I would a scorpion! I’ll have no mercy. All you have made others suffer, you shall suffer tenfold. Every slow torture you have ever inflicted shall be paid back until I’ve ground the life out of you! I’ll have you praying for death, and not daring to die! And I’ll begin as soon as I reach Glen Gower!”

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. VARNECK’S MYSTERY.

WHILE Captain Dandin played the Good Samaritan in Boston, life went very quietly at Glen Gower. Mrs. Gilbert Varneck was quite well again—a trifle pale and nervous still, but able to join the family as usual.

“You don’t look like a nervous subject, Eleanor,” her husband said, thoughtfully, “and you never used to be. How is it? What made you faint—the heat, or Dandin’s raw-head-and-bloody-bones story?”

Mrs. Varneck was standing by her chamber window, looking out at the sunlit fields, and the white cashmere robe she wore was not more colorless than her face.

“The heat, I suppose. Why should Captain Dandin’s ghastly tales affect me? I have suffered enough and endured enough in the past nine years to make me nervous, Heaven knows! By the bye, when did your friend leave?”

She asked the question with studied carelessness, never looking round.

“A week ago,” the colonel replied. “He remained three days longer than he had intended, out of solicitude for you. He was terribly alarmed lest his sensational story had caused your fainting fit.”

“Captain Dandin thinks too highly of his power as a narrator,” Mrs. Varneck said, coldly. “I don’t like that man. Is he coming back?”

“Yes, my dear, in a week or two. And you really don’t like him, Eleanor? Now, that’s odd! Most people like the talkative captain. It’s rather unlucky, too; for we must be civil, willy-nilly. He saved my life in Spain, you know.”

"So I have heard. How was it?"

"Oh, we were attacked by brigands, one dark, wet night, between Barcelona and Valencia, and the captain fought like a lion. By Jove! he has the ferocity of a tiger when his blood is up. He laid about him right and left, like a madman; tore off a big, black-bearded bandit who had me by the throat, and made mince-meat of him—split his skull to the chin. It was hot work while it lasted, and I lost more blood than I could conveniently spare. Two of our traveling companions were killed, and the captain himself got two or three stiletto stabs. We got to Valencia somehow, and Dandin took me to his own quarters, had me nursed and brought round by an old woman who kept his house and took care of his daughter. You see, my dear, I owe him a debt of gratitude not easily repaid."

"Then Captain Dandin is a married man?"

"So it appears; but he lost his wife many years ago. If she resembled her daughter, she must have been a beauty born. The loveliest little cherub you ever beheld, Eleanor, with magnificent Spanish eyes, and black ringlets down to her waist!"

Mrs. Varneck shrugged her dainty shoulders.

"It is unfortunate her father does not share her super-abundant good looks. I thought when I saw him first, and I think still, he is the most hideous object I ever beheld. I don't like him, Gilbert, and I hope you will get rid of him as soon as may be."

She passed out of the room as she spoke, and her husband looked after her with a strangely troubled face.

"Is that Eleanor—my gentle, tender-hearted Eleanor, who would once have cherished a gorilla if it had befriended me—the woman who made that unfeeling speech? Heaven forgive me, but there are times when I think it would almost be better had I never found my wife. Those nine long years of poverty and suffering have changed her as surely woman never changed before. I left the gentlest, sweetest, most tender-hearted little dove that ever fluttered timidly to man's heart for shelter, and I find a radiant bird of paradise in her stead—far more beautiful, perhaps, but not half so lovely—cold and worldly, and bitter and hard. No; my darling is dead and buried in my heart, and my brilliant wife has risen from her ashes! And yet, what an ungenerous brute I am! for she loves me devotedly, passionately. I dare say the fault is in myself; the first freshness and spring-time of youth is gone, and I have grown flinty and suspicious and cold-hearted from rough knocking around the world. Yes, I have grown a cyn-

ical, suspicious wretch, and I have looked at my beautiful wife before now and wondered if I were not the victim of some horrible delusion—the Eleanor Varneck of the present is so little like the Eleanor Varneck of the past.”

Gilbert Varneck rose and paced the room with that face of darkly troubled thought. Yes, there were times when he doubted the identity of his wife—doubted, yet never dreamed of the truth. This brilliant, self-possessed woman with the flashing Assyrian eyes and haughty, uplifted grace was very unlike the shy, dove-eyed darling he had left, and yet the same. Time had done it, no doubt. Time had changed him, too; but the something that had vanished left a dreary, aching void in his heart. The old, passionate love was gone. His stately wife was very brilliant and fascinating, but the insane desire that lovers feel—to take her in his arms and hold her there close to his heart forever—never came to him now. Something very sweet and precious had left his life forever—the power of strong, devoted love—and the Gilbert and Eleanor Varneck of to-day were as unlike the Gilbert and Eleanor of ten years ago as mortal man and woman could be.

“You don’t love me, Gilbert—you don’t love me!” the woman would cry out passionately sometimes. “Oh, Gilbert, Gilbert! if I lose your love I shall die!”

The cry came from her strong, impulsive heart, for the woman who had sought him for his name and his wealth, the woman who had palmed herself upon him as the wife of his youth, had learned to love him with her whole heart and soul, as your flashing-eyed, tempestuous creatures only love. She knew now what a pitiful delusion that girlish fancy for Gerald Rosslyn had been—that mad infatuation which had wrecked her whole life. It was but a girl’s romantic fancy for a handsome face—a romantic fancy captivated to-day by a blonde Apollo, and to-morrow by a modern Corsair or Count Lara.

But this was different. She had ensnared the man, entrapped him into a marriage; and, lo! ere the honey-moon was ended, she was going mad for love of him. This hero of a hundred battles, with the beauty of a demi-god and the generous heart of a king—ah, surely here was a man for a woman to worship, to glory in, to die for! And he did not love her. He was hers, her husband; every outward form of affection was scrupulously observed; but his heart to her was cold and still as stone.

“It is my punishment,” she thought, bitterly—“my just and righteous retribution. He does not know of the fraud I have perpetrated, but his true and loyal heart feels it. I love

him with my whole wicked heart and soul and strength—and he just tolerates me. But he shall love me—he shall!” The haughty head reared itself fiercely, the black eyes flashed impetuous fire. “Am I not ten thousand times more beautiful, more fascinating, than the bread-and-butter-eating school-girl he married and lost? He shall love me, or Adelia Lyon’s right hand shall lose its cunning to work and her brain the power to plot! He is all my own; it will go hard with me if I do not make him worship the very ground I tread on. Oh, Gilbert! my darling, my darling!”—her black eyes flashed upon the pictured face of her husband—“you don’t know how I love you!”

And now, when all was won—when the game seemed safely in her own hands, when the goal of her hopes was obtained—behold! a cloud arose, no bigger than a man’s hand, that threatened to overspread her whole sky.

A new and terrible discovery threatened her—a discovery that would sweep from her in an instant home, friends, wealth, husband—all!

Who was this hideous man—this sinister Captain Dandin—who had come all the way from Spain to rake up the dead past and fling it in her frightened face?

“Does he know,” she thought, turning deathly cold with fear—“does he know my dark, dreadful story, or was his relating it a mere accidental coincidence? Great Heaven! it would be worse than madness, worse than death, to lose all now! I could give up this stately home, this wealth, this luxury—my child, even—without a pang, and go forth, with the husband I love, to beggary. But to lose him—to be cast forth with scorn and hatred from his side!” Her teeth clinched convulsively and her face turned livid. “Let the man or woman who dare come between us beware! for, by all that is holy, their life shall pay the forfeit! Safer was it for Captain Dandin to tamper with the lightning’s chain—with a lioness robbed of her young—than with the burning love of this passionate heart!”

She sat before her mirror, thinking such thoughts as these, one misty September evening some four weeks after the departure of the captain. She lay back in a great carved and gilded chair, while her maid combed out her blue-black masses of rich hair.

It was the anniversary of Gilbert Varneck’s birth—his thirty-second birthday—and madame had decided it must be celebrated by a ball, to which half the country was to be invited.

All the lower rooms were glittering with lights in the early dusk, decorated with flowers, and a band from Baltimore had been engaged, and the supper-table was a perfectly dazzling vision of antique silver and sparkling glass.

Mrs. Gilbert Varneck sat in her gilded *fauteuil*, looking out through the open window at the silvery twilight, with a moody frown. A horrible dread of this unknown man possessed her—a dread that deepened every day, since every passing hour brought the time of his return nearer.

Did he know, or was it merely a dreadful coincidence? Her thoughts rang the changes on these two questions day and night—day and night. Would his coming bring her safety, or bring the hour of her downfall?

The silvery dusk deepened. The round, white September moon lifted her glittering shield over the tree-tops, and the tremulous stars came out in their shining glory. Susan had finished her task, and stood gazing at her mistress in an ecstasy of delight.

"You do look splendid, Mrs. Gilbert! There won't be a lady at the ball to-night half so beautiful as you!"

Hearing this, Mrs. Gilbert Varneck aroused herself from her trance to look. The full-length mirror, blazing with wax-lights, showed her a dazzling vision.

A robe of golden *moiré* swept, in a train of richness, the carpet; diamonds that had blazed in the bosom of Mme. Varneck's great-grandmother ran like a river of light around her throat, flashed on her arms, shone in her ears, and a circlet of dull gold gleamed in the raven coils of her hair.

Yes, she was beautiful—a Helen for whom another Troy might be lost, a Juno to queen it over gods and men. Her proud face softened, her somber eyes lighted up.

"You have dressed me well, Susie. You may go. But first, have the company begun to arrive?"

"Oh, yes, missus. They allays come early. I heard the first carriage half an hour ago. Old madame is in the saloon receiving them."

"Very well, Susan. Now go."

The girl departed.

Mrs. Varneck, taking one more triumphant look at her own splendor, swept from the room.

"Let Captain Dandin do his worst!" she thought, with flashing eyes. "The man is not born who can resist me!"

She tapped at the door of her husband's study.

"Come in," called the voice of the colonel; and, opening it, she rustled in.

Colonel Varneck, dressed for the evening, lay back in an arm-chair, solacing himself with a cigar and the society of his little daughter, before the labors of the campaign commenced.

"Oh, mamma," cried little Dora, in a rapture, "how nice you look! See, papa—see!"

Colonel Varneck rose, flung his cigar out of the window, and stood looking at his wife.

How radiantly beautiful she was! The dark cheeks were flushed, the eyes shone with a streaming fire. If the woman could not touch his heart, the woman's supernal beauty could at least dazzle his eyes.

"It is a goddess! it is the Venus Celestis! it is Juno herself! Is this gorgeous vision really plain Gilbert Varneck's wife, or a Cleopatra for whom a thousand Antonys might go stark mad? My glorious Eleanor! you are perfectly dazzling to-night!"

She came toward him; both hands clasped on his shoulder, the starry eyes luminous with love.

"So that I am fair in your eyes, my love, my husband, I care not for all the world besides. Gilbert, Gilbert! you will love me by and by even as you loved me ten long years ago. You will try, will you not, my husband? for, oh, I love you ten thousand-fold more now than ever you were loved in the past!"

Her face dropped on his shoulder with a sort of sob. Whatever was false about this woman, her mad love for him at least was passionately true.

Gilbert Varneck drew her close to him, with the sharpest pang of remorse he had ever felt.

"My darling! my Eleanor! that were an easy task. Why, my beautiful wife, half the men in the house will be ready to go mad with envy when they see you to-night. Come, it is time we went down. Run away to your nurse, Miss Eudora; little girls should go to roost with the chickens."

He kissed her fondly—the big soldier was very fond of his pretty little gray-eyed girl—drew his wife's arm within his own, and descended the shining stairs.

Decorated with flowers and evergreens, ablaze with lights, stair-way, halls, and reception-rooms were one long vista of light and splendor.

Old Mme. Varneck, stately in sober satin and old point-lace, stood receiving her guests, like a queen holding a Drawing-room. Her eyes kindled with pride as they rested on her regal daughter-in-law.

"My dear, you surpass yourself to-night. You are really

magnificent! Come here; I want to present two or three very old friends."

Colonel Varneck resigned his wife with a smile, and went off to make himself agreeable.

The very old friends were presented to "my daughter" by the uplifted lady of the house, and Mrs. Gilbert received them with the regal grace of a princess.

She saw the wondering looks which even good-breeding could not wholly repress, and smiled inwardly.

Was this gorgeous creature, with the dark beauty of an Eastern sultana and the innate hauteur of an empress, the miserable little sewing-girl Gilbert Varneck had picked up in the streets of New York?

Colonel Varneck's birthday fête was a complete success, and Mrs. Colonel Varneck was decidedly the most beautiful and most brilliantly dressed woman present.

She danced as though she had been born a French woman or a ballet-dancer; she sung, and people held their breath to listen; she talked, and her radiant smiles and gay repartee turned bewildered masculine heads. She was determined to be irresistible to-night, and for Gilbert Varneck's wife to determine was to succeed.

A little before supper, wearied with her exertions—for to be fascinating for three or four hours at a stretch does require some exertion—a trifle flushed and heated, Mrs. Varneck left her dazzled admirers, and walked away by herself to one of the long windows opening on the lawn.

It stood wide this warm September night, and the cool beauty without tempted her to step through. The great, round midnight moon sailed serenely up the star-gemmed sky; the soft night breeze stirred the whispering leaves; the grass sparkled with dew. Holding up her glistening robe, she stepped down the graveled pathway, a golden, shining vision in the misty moonlight.

Ten minutes passed—fifteen. The fascinating Mrs. Varneck was beginning to be missed.

A dashing young Maryland squire came up to Colonel Varneck, who stood the laughing center of a little group of girls.

"I say, colonel, where's your wife? I have the promise of this dance, and there's the music; but where is she?"

"Really, Vesey," laughed the colonel, "I can't say. You must be responsible for her safe-keeping, for I saw Doctor Lawson resign her to you some half hour since. Has she—"

He never finished the sentence. A shriek, shrill, wild, piercing, rang through the room, electrifying every one. An

instant after, and a flying figure came springing in the window, rending the air with screams. It was Mrs. Gilbert Varneck.

“Save me, Gilbert! Save me! save me!”

He darted forward in wild alarm.

“For God’s sake, Eleanor—” he cried.

But before he could catch her she had fallen at his feet in spasms.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LITTLE TALK WITH CAPTAIN DANDIN.

MME. VARNECK’S brilliant ball broke up in wildest confusion. Mrs. Gilbert Varneck fell from one spasm into another—a terrible sight to see.

Her husband carried her up to her room, and his mother and Susan took off the gorgeous robes, the diamonds, and the golden tiara.

The family physician was summoned and restoratives applied, and all was consternation and dismay.

“Oh! what was it—what was it?” the ladies cried, clasping their pretty hands. “What did she see? Where had she been? Who had frightened her like this?”

And the gentlemen looked in one another’s pale, blank faces in speechless amaze.

“She must have gone out in the grounds for a breath of fresh air,” Colonel Varneck suggested, very pale, but self-possessed. “Some one may be lurking there and have frightened her. I propose we search.”

And search they did, most thoroughly, by moonlight and lamp-light, but in vain. No one was there—the waving trees and the moonlight had it all to themselves.

In the midst of the “confusion worse confounded,” a gentleman wearing a long, foreign-looking cloak and carrying a valise in his hand made his way among them, staring at the well-dressed crowd of ladies and gentlemen, so wildly excited, with wondering eyes.

“Have they turned peaceful Glen Gower into a *maison de santé*, and are the lunatics holding high carnival by moonlight? My colonel, have you gone mad with the rest, or only turned keeper?”

The gentleman with the valise asked this question, tapping Colonel Varneck lightly on the shoulder.

“Oh, Dandid! is it you?” the colonel replied, with a stare

"Have you just arrived? Happy to see you again. Some of the servants will conduct you to your room."

"But the hubbub, colonel? Is the Chesapeake on fire, or has an earthquake occurred? What is the matter?"

"Nothing, I begin to think—an imaginary alarm. My wife was out here a few moments ago, and something terrified her. We are searching, but can find nothing."

Captain Dandin shrugged his shoulders.

"The moonlight, my friend, playing fandangoes among those wind-tossed trees. Madame is excitable, as we know—nervous beyond anything I ever saw. You will find the fright all an allusion."

It seemed so; no living thing was to be found, and the startled searchers returned to the house. But though the fright might be imaginary, the result was terribly real. Mrs. Gilbert Varneck still worked in violent hysterics up in her room.

The company dispersed in sorrow and dismay, and in half an hour after the captain arrived

"The lights were fled, the garlands dead,
And the banquet-hall deserted."

"How very inopportune!" the captain said. "And to think I should miss the ball and the sight of all your pretty Maryland belles! The hour is late; but with your leave, my colonel, I will smoke a cigar out yonder before I retire."

The colonel went up to his wife's room, and the captain stepped through the open casement out under the shining stars.

As he lighted his Havana he looked up at these golden luminaries with a queer smile.

"My lucky stars are in 'the ascendant to-night,'" he thought, "else I had never arrived at so propitious a moment. My pretty Adelia, you may be very nervous and excitable, but, by my faith, you had good reason for the hysterics this time!"

All night long the doctor remained in close attendance upon Mrs. Varneck. Toward morning, under the influence of a powerful opiate, she fell asleep, and he at length quitted his post.

"You had better retire now, madame," he said to Mme. Varneck. "Mrs. Gilbert will do very well. Let her be quiet when she awakes; don't permit her to talk much. I will drive over again in the course of the afternoon. Give her this sedative an hour or two after breakfast."

It ~~was~~ late in the forenoon before the patient awoke. Mme. Varneck had not yet arisen. Susan had fallen into a deep sleep in her arm-chair near the bed.

The colonel, who had watched throughout the night, had gone down-stairs for a cup of coffee and a matutinal smoke.

As he re-entered the chamber he found his wife lying with her great dark eyes open and fixed in a blank stare on the opposite wall.

"My dear," the colonel said, bending over her, "how do you feel?"

The haggard eyes turned upon him with a look of such utter misery and despair that he shrunk from their weird light.

"You are better, are you not? Don't talk if you feel unequal to the exertion. You fainted last night, you remember. What was it that frightened you, Eleanor?"

At the simple question she started up in bed with a wild cry of affright, and, flinging her arms around him, clung to him as for dear life.

"Save me, Gilbert—save me!" she cried, shrilly. "Oh, save me from that horrible thing!"

"My Eleanor—my wife! what horrible thing? My dear, my dear! don't excite yourself in this dreadful way! Nothing shall harm you here. What is it I am to save you from?"

But she only clung to him the closer, trembling convulsively from head to foot.

"I can not tell you! I dare not tell you! Oh, Gilbert, take me away from this horrible place, or I shall go mad, mad, mad!"

Colonel Varneck turned very pale. A new and fearful idea dawned upon him. What was this but madness already? He strained her to him with a sudden revulsion that was almost love.

"My love—my wife! for God's sake be calm! Nothing shall harm you, nothing shall come near you. I will take you anywhere in the wide world you wish. Hush! don't talk. Lie still, and drink this."

He soothed her as he would a child, with kisses and caresses. She drank the composing draught he offered, and nestled close to his breast, with long, shuddering sighs.

"Sleep, my darling—sleep in peace. I will not leave you—I will hold you here until you awake."

She twined her arms around his neck; the wild, dark eyes softened with the light of unutterable love.

"My darling! my darling!" she whispered, "this is

heaven! Oh, my love—my own! if I only dared die now, even death would be sweet!”

“But you are not going to die, my Eleanor; you are going to live and make me the happiest man on earth.”

“Would you be sorry, Gilbert—really and truly sorry—if I died to-day?”

“My own, what a question! Sorry to lose my peerless wife? But you are ill and nervous, or you never would think—never would say such strange things. I will take you away from here; we will wander over the Old World. You shall see all the fair foreign cities we have read of; and in years after this we will return, the happiest Darby and Joan alive. Now sleep, and talk no more.”

Mrs. Varneck recovered after this, but very slowly. The most tender care, the most lavish devotion, were hers, but nothing could win from her the cause of her fright and illness.

A mortal paleness overspread her face at the remotest allusion to that night, and by the colonel's command the subject was dropped forever.

It was drawing very near the close of September before Mrs. Varneck ventured down-stairs, and during all that time her husband and mother rarely left her side. But on the occasion of her first appearance in the drawing-room she was quite alone.

An invitation to a wedding-party, impossible to refuse, had come, and Eleanor had insisted on her husband and her mother leaving her for once.

“You have both moped yourselves nearly to death for the past three weeks at my bedside,” she said. “Go this evening, and enjoy yourselves at Miss Clayton's wedding. I shall do very well alone.”

Perhaps the time had come when she was glad to be alone for a little with her own thoughts. Perhaps she was inclined to repay their unselfish devotion for once in kind.

“You are sure you will not be afraid?” Gilbert asked, anxiously.

“Quite sure, my dearest and best!” with her most radiant smile. “With my books and my piano, this bright fire, and little Dora it will go hard with me if I can not drag out one evening. You must not quite make a spoiled baby of me, Gilbert.”

The pretty drawing-room looked very bright and cozy with its sparkling coal-fire, its glowing draperies as they left her alone in it. Outside, the September evening was bleak and

overcast; the black, scudding clouds threatened rain, and the shrill wind whistled eerily through the trees. Eleanor Varneck nestled closer in her luxurious chair, and put her slippered feet on the shining fender with a little, comfortable shiver as she listened to the bleak blowing of the chill blast.

The door was ajar; it opened noiselessly, and a man came in. An instant he stood contemplating her with a demoniac smile. Her illness had left her very thin and wan, and the dark, deep eyes and dead-black hair rendered her marble pallor all the more startling.

"Going," he thought—"going already—that brilliant beauty which is her all! It will wither as a waxen japonica withers in a December blast. And then, my lady, what is left?"

He drew near; he stood close behind her. Still she never heard him. Her eyes were fixed dreamily on the glowing coals. She was very happy to-night—happier than she had been for a long time. Gilbert Varneck had been the most tender of husbands, the most devoted of lovers during the past few weeks, and time and eternity held nothing half so precious to this woman as her husband's love.

"I am very glad to see you again, Mrs. Varneck. It is a long time since we met."

She bounded from the chair with a cry. There, by her side, stood the man she hated and feared most on earth!

"Have I startled you? Ah, unfortunate that I am! Ten thousand pardons for my indiscretion, but I was so glad. They told me you were here; they asked me to come and amuse you, and I have come."

She never spoke; she could not. She stood stock still, livid with terror, both hands pressed hard over her heart.

"Do sit down, dear lady. Don't look at me with such wild eyes. It is I—Dandin—and no ghost. By the way, are there ghosts at Glen Gower, and did you see one the other night?"

He laughed as he spoke—his most sinister laugh—every white tooth gleaming derisively. Mrs. Gilbert Varneck fell back in her chair, the bluish pallor of death stamped in every feature. Twice she essayed to speak, and twice her livid lips failed her. The third time the words came:

"In the name of God, who are you—man or demon?"

"Dear lady"—and Captain Dandin drew up a chair, laughing his softest laugh—"such a singular question! I am Captain Jules Dandin, and your husband's very good friend. He told you so, did he not? And his friends ought to be yours,

for, *mon Dieu!* for a married lady past the honey-moon you are absurdly fond of my big, brown colonel."

"Who are you?" she cried out, shrilly. "Tell me, or I will arouse the house! Who are you? What do you know of me?"

"Ah! now we come to business—now we come to common sense. What do I know of you? Dear Mrs. Gilbert Varneck—most beautiful and most gifted of your sex—everything!"

She sat speechless, looking at him—speechless with mortal fear. Captain Dandin's face was wreathed in blandest smiles. He drew his chair a little closer.

"Dear lady, how nice this is—how cozy, how snug! The big, turbulent world shut out, and this bright fire and pretty room, and only our two selves! I foresee we shall spend a most delightful evening, and I have so much to say to you. Do you know they invited me to the wedding to-night, and I declined? I had important letters to write. I gave up drinking the wine, and tasting the cake, and looking at the pretty bride, all for a little talk with you. I have waited so long, dear lady—ever since the night you were taken ill. Ah, how sudden and how mysterious that was! My heart bled for you and your afflicted husband."

The suppressed mockery of his tone was rousing her. A dusky fire began to burn in the black eyes fixedly regarding him—the light of rising anger. The woman might be a bad woman—a crafty and unprincipled woman—but she was no coward. She sat down and folded her hands in her lap, and looked him full in the face.

"I have only to say the word, Captain Dandin—if that be your name—to have you thrust from this house, from yonder gates, by my husband's slaves. Take care, sir, how you dare abuse his generous confidence and hospitality, and insult his wife!"

"Insult his wife, dear Mrs. Gilbert Varneck? Insult a lady? Forbid it, ye shades of all the Dandins that ever adored beauty! And if I could be so unnatural a monster, dear lady, you, whom I admire above all your charming sex, would be the very last to suffer by my brutality. Oh, no! not for ten thousand worlds would Jules Dandin abuse the confidence and generosity of the most confiding of men—and, oh, my Heaven! how confiding the big, brown colonel is only you and I know."

He laughed his soft, derisive laugh, and the glitter of his deadly black eyes made her blood run cold.

"Why have you come here to-night?" she asked. "What do you want of me?"

"Only a little talk—a little confidential *tête-à-tête*. And what time like the present, when our trusting husband and our stately mamma have gone to the wedding, and we have this big house and pretty room all to ourselves? You expected me, dearest lady. Don't say no. I'm sure you did. You knew when I told that interesting little story of my friend Gerald Rosslyn at the dinner-table, some weeks ago, I would come back. What a tender heart is yours, dear Mrs. Gilbert Varneck, to faint dead away at its tragic climax, and what a beautiful trait is tender-heartedness and timidity in your sex! You knew I would come back, and I have come. And now that I am here, shall I tell you the conclusion of that highly sensational little story of real life?"

She tried to answer him, but her lips failed. An awful trembling seized her from head to foot.

"Silence gives consent!" exclaimed the captain, gayly. "I am to finish my pretty story. Where did I leave off? Oh, I think I told how the deserted one shot the faithless lover at the very altar, and served him quite right, too. He was a villain, that Gerald Rosslyn—a double-dyed traitor and villain—and richly had he earned his fate. I told how she shot him, how she baffled the officers of the law, and made good her escape. I said, I think, that the probabilities lay that she was living yet—perhaps had wormed her way into some aristocratic family, and contrived for herself a wealthy marriage. Dear Mrs. Varneck, I am not a Yankee, but what a clever guess that was! She has wormed her way into a most aristocratic family—she has contrived for herself a wealthy marriage! More, she has palmed off Gerald Rosslyn's child as the child of the man she has duped. Now, what a clever woman, what a talented woman, what a genius she must be, to do all that! I bow in unutterable admiration before such genius. I, Dandin, could not surpass such diabolical scheming myself."

She never spoke. She sat still as stone, white as death, listening to this dreadful man.

"Shall I tell you how it was—open the mysteries and show you how she did it? I will! She had a sister—a year younger—quite as pretty, a thousand times more innocent than herself. A year after Adelia Lyon's elopement this sister, pretty little Eleanor, married a man—no, a rash, impetuous, foolish boy—calling himself Launcelot Lauriston. Launcelot Lauriston never heard of the naughty elder sister who had disgraced

herself and family, and when, eight or nine months after his mad marriage, poverty compelled him to fly the country, he left still in ignorance of that sister's existence. Years passed, and he never returned. His mother, a rich and lonely old woman, advertised for her son's hitherto despised wife, and—found her. Adelia Lyon, the murderess, was earning her living, hardly enough, among strangers. She saw the advertisement, and a plot as cunning and clever as ever entered the head of woman entered hers.

“ ‘My sister is dead,’ said Adelia. ‘Her child’—a little boy, by the way, I believe it was—‘is swallowed up forever in the great wilderness of New York. Launcelot Lauriston is dead and buried long ago, no doubt, since he has never been heard from. His mother never saw his wife. I am as like her as it is possible for sisters to be. Why should the rich old woman's wealth go begging for want of a daughter-in-law? No; I will be her daughter-in-law. I have Eleanor's wedding-ring, her husband's picture, her marriage certificate, which she sent to me when she thought herself dying. There is nothing to hinder my passing myself off as Mrs. Launcelot Lauriston—and I will!’

“ ‘Dear Mrs. Gilbert Varneck, was it not a magnificent idea—worthy of the magnificent creature who conceived it?

“ ‘I will take my child from Granny Croak, in Lymeford,’ Adelia said to herself, ‘and palm it off as the child of Launcelot Lauriston!’

“ ‘Admirable project, and admirably carried out. She did all she said. She did more. When Launcelot Lauriston—which was only an *alias*, by the bye—turned up from the dead, this superb creature actually made him believe she was his deserted wife—made him marry her over again, and is now the most honored and admired among women. By Jove, madame, I lose my breath when I think of it! I could fall at her feet and worship such superhuman genius! Let that woman and Dandin be friends, and the whole world is powerless against them. Let them be enemies, and *pouf!*’”—he blew an imaginary enemy off the tips of his fingers—“thus I send her to perdition. Dear lady, my story is told.”

There was a dead pause. They sat for fully a minute looking into each other's eyes like duelists.

Then Captain Dandin, leaning easily forward, lifted her left arm between his finger and thumb.

“One sister—Gerald Rosslyn's murderess—had a birth-mark, a black triangle, on her left wrist. Launcelot Lauris-

ton's wife had none. It was three little black moles, dear lady—the very image of this!”

He held up the arm. There in the fire-light shone the three black moles. He dropped it, and it fell lifeless by her side.

“I know your story,” he said, every white tooth glistening, “and, Adelia Lyon, I know you! Fairest and cleverest of your sex, let me do homage to your transcendent genius.”

She found her voice at last, numbed to the heart with deadly fear.

“Who are you?” she asked, in a hollow voice; “for you have told me more than mortal man knows.”

“I have told you before who I am—once Gerald Rosslyn's friend. That implies everything. Your friend now, if you wish it. Not for worlds would I be the enemy of so glorious a creature. Every man has his price. Pay me mine and I leave you in peace.”

“What proof have you of this? Suppose I defy you—suppose I bid you do your worst—suppose you go to my husband and tell him all? What proof have you beyond your mere word? He never knew his wife had a sister. Will he believe you when you assert she had?”

Captain Dandin laughed.

“Yes, my dear Adelia, I think he will.”

“How—how will you prove her existence?”

“In the simplest way imaginable—by bringing her before him.”

Mrs. Varneck laughed in her turn—a shrill, hysterical laugh.

“Bring a corpse out of its grave? A woman who, by your own account, has been dead over five years!”

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Varneck; I said nothing of the kind. Adelia Lyon took her sister's death for granted. Captain Dandin never takes anything for granted. I have the strongest internal conviction that you are no more Gilbert Varneck's wife, despite that interesting little ceremony some weeks ago, than I am. I have the strongest idea that his lawful wedded wife is alive and well.”

The woman rose to her feet with a shrill scream—a scream of wild, sharp agony.

“No,” she cried, “no, no, no! he has no wife on earth but me! Eleanor Lyon is dead and buried, and Gilbert Varneck is mine, mine, mine!”

She paused, and stood rooted to the spot in speechless hor-

ror; for there in the door-way, pale and amazed, was Gilbert Varneck himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

SEALING THE BOND.

EVEN Captain Dandin, for an instant, was thunder-struck—only for an instant; then the man rose with the occasion, and was sublime.

“My colonel!” he cried; “like Banquo’s ghost at the Thane of Cawdor’s feast! See how you startle your nervous lady, most inconsiderate of men. I’ll wager, now, she thinks some horrible calamity has befallen. Look! she stands there petrified! Ah, how nervous you are—you American ladies!”

“I think my ‘nervous lady’ was startled before I appeared at all,” Colonel Varneck said, very coldly. “It is you who have startled her, Captain Dandin. What did that shriek mean as I came in?”

“He has heard nothing,” thought the astute Dandin. “He is not the man to beat about the bush. If he had, he would demand an explanation at once. If this woman does not make a fool of herself, the game is all our own yet.”

He caught Mrs. Varneck’s eye for one second—only one—but that piercing glance of warning was enough. She sunk down in her chair, white and trembling, her hand pressed over her heart, catching her cue at once.

“You men are all alike,” she said, pantingly. “One would need cast-iron nerves to tolerate you. First, Captain Dandin terrifies me almost to death with horrible anecdotes of murders and ghosts, and then, just as the horriddest climax of his most horrid story is reached, you must appear, Colonel Varneck, like a specter in a German legend, when I think you half a dozen miles away. There!” with a shrug and a pout; “don’t stand staring, for pity’s sake, but come in and tell us what has brought you back. Where is mother?”

“Safe at the wedding.”

He came slowly forward, with a countenance of dark gravity. Strange suspicions of he knew not what filled his mind. The plausible pretext of Captain Dandin and his wife only troubled him, but did not deceive.

He looked from one face to the other, but the captain wore his brightest smile, and his wife’s fixed pallor told nothing to his honest eyes. Something was wrong. No ghost story told by Captain Dandin had caused that shrill scream of affright.

He had not heard the words, but there was speechless terror in that agonized cry.

Were they trying to deceive him—the wife of his bosom—the friend he trusted? And why? Had they a secret in common which he did not share? Had they ever met before, and where?

“He unbends at last!” the captain exclaimed, with a light laugh. “My colonel, I thought you had looked at Medusa, and were turning to stone. What means that face of petrified severity? What have we done, your good lady or myself, that you regard us with that Gorgon-like stare? Dear madame, is it the green-eyed monster? Is our colonel jealous?”

“Don’t be an idiot, Dandin!” the colonel said, impatiently. “Perhaps I am getting nervous, too, and my wife’s screams have aggravated the disease. It is rather startling to come home suddenly and find the sharer of your joys shrieking like a bedlamite. I trust, for the future, my good friend, you will endeavor to tone down your high-pressure stories, and spare our sensitive nerves.”

He drew up a chair, as he spoke, between the two, and gave the glowing coals a vicious poke.

“Why have you come home, Gilbert?” his wife asked, very gently. “You have not told us yet.”

Her hand sought his; her dark eyes lifted wistfully to his face.

Ah, there was no mistaking that gaze of unutterable love!

“I have returned on your account, my timid Eleanor,” he replied, fully unbending. “I did not know what time Dandin might see fit to get through with his letters, and I didn’t at all like the notion of leaving you solitary and alone all night. So, having deposited madame *mère* safely in the midst of the wedding guests, and drunk the bride’s health in sparkling Moselle, I remounted and—here I am.”

“Then I am off duty!” exclaimed the captain, starting up; “and I shall resume my neglected letters at once. Make my peace with your good lady, my colonel. How was I to know she was so intensely sensitive? Let ignorance plead my pardon this once. I will offend that way no more.”

“Look in upon us before you go to bed, Dandin,” Gilbert said, good-naturedly. “Nelly won’t be implacable, I dare say. You’ll find us here until eleven. Our invalid must not sit up later.”

The captain retired with a nod.

Mrs. Gilbert Varneck snuggled up to her husband with a little hysterical laugh.

"How good you are to me, Gilbert!" she said—"so thoughtful, so solicitous! A thousand times better than I deserve!"

"Not one whit better than you deserve, I hope, Nelly," he said, gravely. "But I wish—I do wish—you were not so hypersensitive. It gave me one of the most disagreeable sensations I ever experienced, standing in that door-way, and seeing you springing up with that wild, wild scream. Eleanor, what had Dandin been telling you?"

The dark look, the ugly feeling of doubt and distrust, came over him again. He could feel her clinging to him closely and convulsively, shuddering through her whole frame. Of all the man's revelations, of all his power over her, nothing had gone home to her inmost soul like the bare hint that she was not Gilbert Varneck's wife.

"What was it?" he repeated.

"A horrible story, Gilbert—a dark and dreadful story. Don't ask me to repeat it. I wish I had never heard it; it will haunt me for a month. Oh!"—her teeth clicked convulsively together, her hands clinched—"how I hate—how I hate that man!"

"Eleanor!"

The shocked tone, the look of grieved surprise and incredulity, brought her to herself. She tried to laugh again, but it was a miserable failure.

"It's these wretched nerves of mine, I suppose, and the man's ill looks. Poor wretch! he can't help his looks, and I can't help my nerves. Don't let us talk of it or of him, Gilbert. Let us try to have a pleasant evening, now that you are here. Listen to the rising wind!" She rose as she spoke, with a strange, wild look of dread in her eyes. "How desolate and lonely it sounds! How wildly the trees rock and the sea moans! I am glad you are here; I am glad I am not to be alone this weird, windy night."

She shivered in the warm air, stood an instant irresolute, then moved with a sudden impulse to the piano.

"We will drown the wails of the wind in a storm of music," she said, with a wild laugh. "It is weeks since I played for you, Gilbert. I will try and make up for it now."

Eleanor Varneck sat down and broke into a noisy prelude, then into song. Song after song she sung in an impassioned, excited way, until she could sing no more; then her fingers flew over the keys in tempestuous marches and galops that crackled sharply as showers of rockets. It was as if she wished to drown a storm within as well as the rising gale without.

And all the while her husband sat listening and watching her, with a face of dark distrust and gloom.

Was her mind giving way? Had he only found his wife to lose her again? Was Eleanor Varneck going mad?

The clock struck eleven. With the last silvery chime the door opened and Captain Dandin came in.

"This must be the music of the spheres. How is it your poet goes? Dear Mrs. Varneck, you are inspired to-night. Pray, pray, don't cease because I intrude."

"I am tired," Mrs. Varneck said, rising as abruptly from the piano as she had gone to it.

"But one song more—only one little chansonette."

"I will sing no more to-night," she said, almost fiercely, closing the instrument and facing him with blazing black eyes.

"Excuse my wife, Dandin," the colonel said, gravely; "she is tired. Eleanor, my dear, it is past eleven. Is it quite prudent for you to remain up longer?"

"I will go," she answered, abruptly. "Good-night."

Captain Dandin sprung with gallant alacrity to open the door.

"The colonel and I will blow a cloud before retiring, but not in your pretty drawing-room. Good-night, dear lady; try and forgive Dandin."

He held out his hand, looking her straight in the eyes. That looked mastered her; her eyes fell, and she laid her ringed hand in his.

"Good-night," she repeated, frigidly.

A scrap of paper was slipped in her palm, then the door closed behind her, and the two men were alone. The hall was flooded with light; she opened the paper there and then, and read its two lines:

"I leave this place in a week. Before the end of the week we must meet again, and alone."

That was all. She went straight up to her room, held the paper in the flame of the candle and burned it to ashes.

"If it were he!" she said, between her set teeth. "If he were tied to a stake, I would light the fagots, and stand by to exult in his dying screams of agony! Is he man or devil, to tell me what he told me to-night?"

Next morning, at breakfast, Captain Dandin formally announced his departure early the following week. Mrs. Varneck was present, but her eyes never looked in his direction—her lips never uttered one polite formula of regret.

"My little Fairy is languishing to see me, I know," he said, "and my business is all arranged. Your long, cold winter approaches, and I must hasten, with the swallows, southward."

"We may meet in Spain," replied Colonel Varneck; "who knows? We are going abroad in a month or two. Mrs. Varneck's health requires immediate change. We may see you and Fairy next in old Valencia."

Late in the day Mme. Varneck returned, full of glowing accounts of the wedding, and everybody's regrets that the colonel and dear, delightful Mrs. Gilbert were not there.

Mrs. Gilbert listened to the old lady's animated talk with dreary listlessness.

"I am glad you enjoyed yourself," she said, with a weary sigh. "It would have bored me to death. I believe I am not adapted for society, after all. I am ever happiest at home."

The weeks went very fast. Mrs. Varneck counted the days. But two remained now until her arch-enemy's departure, and no opportunity yet for that private meeting. Would he really go without insisting upon it? No; that night a second scrap of paper was thrust into her hand:

"You must not go to the dinner-party to-morrow evening. Feign some excuse. I will be under the old elm, down the avenue, at half past nine. Meet me there."

Mrs. Varneck burned the note to ashes, with a face full of dark, vindictive hatred.

"And I must obey him—I must meet him!" she hissed. "Oh, for strength and daring to take a dagger with me and stab him to the heart!"

The dinner-party at Squire Cabell's next night was deprived of its brightest ornament in the absence of Colonel Varneck's brilliant wife. Until the last moment she had fully intended to go; but at the last moment her husband found her lying among the pillows of the lounge, her forehead bandaged, her room darkened, half distracted with headache.

"And you really can not go, Eleanor?" he said, regretfully. "Then, my dearest, I will stay and bear you company."

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "What nonsense, Gilbert! Stay from the dinner-party, the pleasantest of the season—offend Squire Cabell—and all because your fidgety wife happens to have a headache! I won't hear of it! You are dressed, and you shall go at once."

"But, Nelly, do you think me heartless enough to enjoy myself abroad while you are suffering at home?"

"You big, tender-hearted soldier!" she laughed, a little hysterically, as she twined her arms round his neck. "There, go! Console yourself with the thought that I will be better alone. Darkness, silence and sleep are my only remedies, and I can not have them with you at home to talk to me. What time will you be back, Gilbert?"

She asked the question without looking at him. She could not meet the frank, trustful eyes just then.

"Oh, by midnight—long after you are asleep. One can not get away early from Cabell's. Well, good-bye, my own! See that the headache is chased away by the time I return. Shall I send my mother to you?"

"No; I am best alone. Tell her to retire. I shall not quit my room to-night."

"And Susie—you will need her?"

"No," abruptly. "I shall want no one. There! go, Gilbert; you will certainly be late."

He kissed her and departed, whistling a tune. She sat up, listening until the last echo of his footsteps died away, then buried her head among the pillows, and for hours lays motionless as stone.

The day had been dark and bleak; the night closed in early, cheerless and raw. With the darkness rose the wind. It moaned among the tossing trees; it sobbed around the gables; it rattled at closed shutters, and went wailing off in long, lamentable cries.

The guilty woman, lying there alone, shuddered as she listened.

"A fit night," she thought—"a fit night for such dark, sinful, plotting wretches as he and I to be abroad. To think that I am in his power—the power of such a cold-blooded villain as that! After all my scheming, all my labor, all my lies! Surely the vengeance of Heaven has found me out!"

The clock struck nine—only half an hour now. Still she lay there in the darkness, listening to the dreary shrieking of the wind, motionless as marble.

The house was very still. Mme. Varneck had retired to her own apartments; the servants were assembled in the large, cheery kitchen. It was easy enough to quit the house unobserved now.

A little before half past nine she rose and lighted one of the wax tapers standing on her dressing-table. The pale glimmer

showed her ghastly white, with burning black eyes, and every feature set rigid as marble.

Her dress needed no change; it was dark and noiseless. She threw a water-proof cloak around her, drew the hood over her head, opened the door, locked it securely, and flitted away.

As she well knew, the halls and stair-ways were quite deserted. She opened the house door without meeting a soul, and passed out into the black, windy night.

It was very dark. The black sky seemed settling down on the tops of the surging trees, and great rain-drops were already beginning to fall. But she knew her way well, and she sped along swiftly in the direction of the avenue, and down to where stood the hoary old elm.

"True to your trust," a well-known voice said, "as I knew you would be. Bravest, most admirable of women, how can I ever thank you for braving the inclemency of this wild night, and meeting me here? With your terrible headache, too!"

He laughed softly—his most derisive laugh.

It was so dark she had not seen him until he stepped forward from the shadow of the tree. Even then she could make out but indistinctly the outline of his form. That darkness hid from him as well the fierce, vindictive look of deadly hatred with which her eyes gleamed.

"You mocking demon!" she hissed. "I wonder you are not afraid! I wonder you are not afraid I shall murder you where you stand!"

Again he laughed, and the words are poor and weak to tell all the bitter derision and scorn of that laugh.

"Afraid of you, my dainty Adelia? Oh, no, my dear! Afraid you will murder me? No, no, no! You tried that little game with Gerald Rosslyn, poor devil! but you won't try it with Jules Dandin! No, we won't murder each other; we will be sensible and leave out high tragedy, and you will do everything I say, and I—well, I won't hang you!"

He heard her drawing her breath hard, he heard her teeth clinch; but the madness blazing in those burning black eyes he could not see.

"Some clever person said once the worse use you can put a man to is to hang him. I agree with that clever person. I might hang you, my dear Mrs. Varneck, but since I can put you to ever so much better use, why on earth should I? Besides, if I were an enemy of yours—which I am not, of course—there is another capital punishment I can inflict, hardly second to the hanging. I might separate you from our gallant colonel—our handsome, gullible, idolized husband."

"Why have you brought me here?" she demanded, in a shrill, piercing voice. "Was it to drive me mad with your taunts? Take care, man! If you have an object in view, better not drive me mad before you attain it."

"Very true—sensibly put. Why should we recriminate? I hold you under my heel. I can crush you as I would a worm at any instant. You know that. You are a clever woman and a wise woman, and you will not resist an absolute power. You will yield gracefully, since yield you must. You will do everything I demand without demur."

"And what do you want?"

"At last—there it is in plain, homely English. What do I want? Fairest Adelia, what's the great want of the world?"

"Not that name!" she cried, stamping her foot—"not that name, on your peril! I am Eleanor Varneck—the only Eleanor Varneck alive. Don't dare call me by that abhorred title!"

"As you please. What does it signify—Adelia or Eleanor—Aspasia or Jezebel? Any of them will answer."

"What did you mean that night by telling me *she* was alive?" she asked, uttering at length the question that had been rankling in her mind so long. "You knew the assertion was the falsest of untruths!"

Captain Dandin smiled under cover of the darkness. He saw that she believed this at least—firmly believed in her sister's death, and it was no part of his present policy to deceive her. She was secure enough in his power without that.

"Perhaps; let it go. You took her death for granted five years ago. She has not turned up since—no doubt she starved her miserable life out, and fills a pauper's grave. But that is beside the question; we have nothing to do with her. A live dog is better than a dead lion. Pardon the simile—coarse but forcible. Let us come to what I want. Dear lady, it is the universal want—money."

"And I have none."

"No? But you can get it. Oh, yes, you can! The big brown colonel will give you half his kingdom if you ask for it. Still, I will not be so hard on you as that. Five thousand dollars within the next eight days will do for the present. A paltry pittance, but then I am an easy man."

"It is utterly impossible."

"Dear Mrs. Colonel Varneck, I know no such word. I don't know how you are to get it; I only know that I must have it within the next eight days."

"And if I fail?"

"If you fail—well, it will be rather serious for you, since I will feel it my duty to tell all to the confiding colonel. And you are so fond of him. *Mon Dieu!* my heart bleeds at the thought."

"Enough," she said, hoarsely. "You shall have it—you must. And for that sum you will swear eternal secrecy?"

"Swear? Dear lady, I will swear ten thousand oaths if you wish—I don't share the vulgar prejudice about kissing the Book. Oaths or words, it is all the same to Dandin. But if you ask if five thousand dollars is the price of my secrecy forever, I answer no—emphatically no! That is but a sop to Cerberus. I want your diamonds."

The words rolled out like bullets. She fairly uttered a cry:

"What?"

"Your diamonds, fairest Adelia—nay, I beg pardon, Eleanor—those magnificent family jewels I saw blazing on your neck and arms, and fingers and ears, the night of the ball."

"Wretch! extortioner!" she cried, passionately. "I will not. For centuries they have been the pride of the Varnecks' most cherished heir-looms. I tell you I will not."

"Then it is quite time they changed hands. Madame, madame, madame, don't be silly! Why say no in that frantic manner, since you know it must be yes? You must give me the diamonds."

In the darkness he heard the wretched woman's cry of rage and despair, and the sweetest music earth ever heard could not have sounded one half so sweet to the man.

"That unearthly groan means yes," he said, triumphantly. "Dearest Mrs. Varneck, the fraud will never be found out. I will send you a set of paste brilliants from New York to replace them, so exactly alike that not one in a thousand will be able to tell the difference. The diamonds I must have to-morrow."

"Is this all?" she asked, in a hollow voice.

"By no means—only the beginning. Come, I will make a compact with you—a fair and honorable bargain. You have heard of men who sold their souls to the—well, his Satanic Majesty. They sold those pitiful souls of theirs for wealth and honor for a certain term of years, and I dare say, if all was known, his Satanic Majesty had the worst of the bargain. Now, that is what I want you to do, or something very like it. For the next eight years I agree to keep your secret inviolable on condition that you give me five thousand dollars a

year for that time. I sell myself cheap, dear lady—dirt cheap.”

“And at the end of that time?”

“At the end of that time I am free once more—my promise goes no further. I make no threats—I make no promises. ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’ For eight years wealth, honor, a happy home, the love of the man you adore—all will be yours for five thousand dollars per annum. Cheap, cheap, cheap! Dear lady, the rain begins to fall; it wears late—say yes.”

“Yes.”

The monosyllable fell from her lips like a stone. Even the cool captain was a little startled, but in the pitchy darkness he could not see her face.

“Then give me your hand.”

She stretched it out with the most blood-chilling laugh he had ever heard outside a mad-house.

“My hand? Oh, yes! I have sold you my soul—why not seal the bond? Is there anything else?”

“There is nothing else. We can trust each other, I think. I never break a promise, and woe to you, Adelia Lyon, if you break yours. Will you take my arm and come in? The rain is falling heavily.”

“No.”

“You will be wet, Mrs. Varneck—drenched to the skin. Better come in.”

“No.”

“You will be missed—they will be locking up the house. Do come.”

“No.”

“The colonel will return; he will find you out. For pity’s sake, don’t be a fool. Come in.”

“No!” she shrieked, with a sudden frenzied outburst; “no, I tell you—no! I will not go in. What do I care for the rain? Leave me, wretch, monster, devil, or I will strangle you where you stand!”

Captain Dandin shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

“‘When a woman won’t, she won’t,’ he muttered, ‘and there’s an end on’t.’ Well, good-night, Mrs. Varneck; if you catch the influenza, don’t blame me.”

She never heeded him; she fell flat on her face in the wet grass. The rain beat pitilessly down upon her, the wind fluttered her garments—she never felt them. For the time being, she was really mad—mad with rage and remorse, and misery and despair. She forgot everything—her husband’s

return, the raging storm, her own danger. She lay there prone on the drenched earth, as miserable a woman as ever the black night hid.

She arose at last, chilled to the heart, drenched to the bone. What time had passed she knew not—hours, perhaps—centuries of anguish they had been to her. She arose and staggered through the darkness to the house. The front door stood wide; the hall was brightly lighted. A servant who had sat up for his master was holding the door open, and beside him, pallid with consternation, was Colonel Varneck.

“For God’s sake, Eleanor!”

He caught the drenched, ghastly specter in his arms, but with a piercing maniacal scream she fled from him.

“Let me go!” she cried—“let me go, Gilbert, or you will drive me mad!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY THE STATUE OF NIOBE.

A HOPELESSLY wet day, a black sky, a drenched earth, a wailing wind—a cold, raw, cheerless first of October. A bad day for Captain Dandin’s journey, and in the 2:50 A. M. train that gallant foreigner was to leave Baltimore.

He sat down-stairs in the library with Colonel Varneck, smoking a parting cigar. The window was open, and the bleak wind blew in their faces, but neither of the men seemed to heed it. Captain Dandin smoked, and watched the scudding clouds with an impassive countenance, but Gilbert Varneck wore the darkest look of gloom that ever the captain had seen on his face. He glanced at him furtively from time to time, understanding it all.

“What fools women are!” he thought, “even the cleverest of them. The feminine brain is capable of conceiving the boldest and most original of plots—the feminine intellect is capable of daringly carrying it through to the end. But once lay a strain on the feminine heart, and *pouf!* a child could upset their brightest schemes. A woman in love is a woman no sensible man will trust. To think that that infatuated creature should stay out beneath the pouring rain last night until midnight, and then come reeling home under her husband’s scandalized eyes! No wonder he thinks her mad. I believe, in my soul, there is a screw loose somewhere—a blue lookout for me. I hope she won’t forget the diamonds, and ‘time is on the wing.’”

No, she had not forgotten. Through all the misery,

through all the madness of that most wretched night and morning, she remembered her compact. While the two men smoked and watched the ceaseless rain, she lay on her bed, white and haggard, suffering such tortures as lost souls alone suffer. She was in this man's power—hopelessly, irretrievably. She must obey, command as he might. No slave on her husband's estate was one iota more of a slave than she.

She arose at last. It was drawing near noon, and the jewels must be delivered. The long, white folds of her dressing-gown fell loose about her; her great, haggard black eyes looked out with stony despair from her rigid face. She drew the casket of gold and velvet from its hiding-place, opened it with a little key attached to her watch-chain, and stood long and earnestly regarding them. The magnificent jewels blazed amid the ruby velvet—a dazzling river of light and splendor—almost priceless in their worth. She had a true woman's love for jewels, and the haggard eyes seemed, in their greedy intensity, to literally devour the gems.

"The tears were in Madame Varneck's eyes when she gave me these," she thought, "as she kissed and blessed her only son's wife. Oh, my God! if she only knew what a lost, abandoned wretch I am."

She closed the casket, relocked it hastily, as though afraid to trust herself longer before their glorious dazzle, and, with a steady step, quitted the room. She went straight to the apartment of Captain Dandin and tapped at the door. It was opened by the captain himself.

"At last!" he said. "I left the colonel half an hour ago, and have been impatiently awaiting you here ever since. Pray come in. It won't do to talk in the passage, with those prying prigs of servants about. Have you the diamonds?"

He spoke abruptly, his sallow face flushed, his eager, black eyes alight. He knew the value of those superb heir-looms even better than she did.

She handed him the casket.

"Ah! true to your word. Ten thousand thanks, dear lady! Where is the key?"

She unfastened it from her watch-chain and handed it to him, still in silence.

"Thanks once more. I don't doubt your word, dear lady—Heaven forbid! But still it is as well to be business-like. Here they are. Ah! how they blaze—a perfect bed of fire! The Varnecks have a right to be proud of the family diamonds. Thanks, Mrs. Varneck, again and again. You are

the honorable lady I took you for, and they are all here, not a stone missing. Now, about the money?"

He closed the casket and faced her, with his sinister smile at its brightest.

"I leave to-day, you know," he said. "Adam quitting Paradise once again. I remain in New York a fortnight, which will give you ample time to obtain the five thousand. My stopping-place is the Astor. I shall look for a letter within six days."

"You shall have it," she said, speaking for the first time. "Is there anything else?"

"There is nothing else, most admirable of women. We understand each other fully. We will each of us hold to our compact. Once a year you will hear from me; once a year I will receive five thousand dollars from you. When the eight years expire we will meet once more, face to face."

"And then?" she asked, in a hollow voice.

Captain Dandin shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"And then? Who knows? I make no threats. I utter no promises. Then I am free."

"To ruin me?"

"Ruin is an ugly word, dear lady. Why use it? I say nothing. Why project ourselves into the future? 'Let us crown ourselves with roses before they fade,' saith the French proverb. Take the goods the gods provide for the next eight years. It is a long time, dear Mrs. Varneck, and never look beyond."

"You say well," Eleanor Varneck said, in the same unnatural tone. "I will take the bliss of the present and never look forward. Why should I, since the hour that sees you betray me sees you die? Yes, Captain Dandin"—her eyes blazed up with their old fire—"you will learn then what it is to drive a reckless woman to desperation. By dagger, by pistol, or by poison, as sure as there is a Heaven above us, the hour that sees you betray my secret sees you die!"

Captain Dandin laughed aloud, the mocking laugh of a triumphant demon.

"Fairest Adelia—no, no, Eleanor—threatened men live long, and barking dogs seldom bite. What jewels of truth there are in the heads of these homely proverbs. Never threaten, dear Mrs. Varneck. It is infallibly the sign of a weak mind. Let us say good-bye—let us part friends. We will not threaten each other. We will simply hold our tongues, and when the time comes we will act."

He held the door open for her to pass out, and then the mortal enemies parted in ominous peace.

Captain Dandin bade farewell to his friends at Glen Gower, and was driven to the station by the colonel himself. Mrs. Varneck was too ill to appear, and the gallant captain was loud in his regrets, and left the politest of remembrances for her. He kissed little Dora with fatherly effusion.

"When I return to Glen Gower I will bring my little girl," he said; "and how charmed my willful Fairy will be with the delightful little heiress of Glen Gower!"

The two men parted, and Gilbert Varneck returned home. The rain still fell; the sky was still inky black; the October afternoon was already beginning to darken when he reached the house.

He went straight to his wife's room. A horrible dread for her possessed him body and soul. She was losing her reason. What was it but madeness—her frantic conduct of last night?

Mrs. Varneck lay on a sofa, half buried amid pillows of crimson silk, her white face, looking out from the glowing color, awfully death-like and still. She was not asleep. The hollow black eyes stared blankly before her with an expression of unutterable weariness. Body and soul she was tired, worn out, wearied to death of this endless plotting, treachery and lies.

Her husband bent above her and kissed the wan cheek with a look of infinite tenderness and compassion in his cloudless blue eyes.

"My poor, pale darling!" he said, pityingly—"my 'rare, pale Margaret!' what shall I do to bring back the lost roses to those marble cheeks?"

She laid her head on the faithful, trusting heart that daily and hourly she was betraying, with a long, heart-sick shudder.

"Only love me and pity me, dear, for I am very miserable!"

"And wherefore, my Eleanor? Why should you be miserable? We all love you. What need is there for our pity?"

"Ah, you don't know—you don't know! and I dare not tell!"

"My wife, is there one secret in your heart you dare not tell your husband?"

"Oh, least of all to you—least of all the world to you. Gilbert! Gilbert! my love! my husband! don't ask me!"

He grew very pale as he listened to her wild words. He could feel her trembling like an aspen in his arms.

"I must ask you, Eleanor!" he cried, almost passionately.

"You must tell me! You are driving me wild with all this mystery—with all this despairing grief! Can you doubt my love? Can you think so basely of me as to imagine anything can sever me from my wife? Oh, my dearest! lay aside these foolish fears. Trust as well as love. Open your heart to me; tell me all your troubles. You must tell me, Eleanor, for you are killing me!"

She looked up in his pale, agitated face, and saw the living truth of his words.

"Forgive me—forgive me!" she exclaimed. "It was to save you pain I did it. But, come what will, you shall know all—come what will, the mystery will end. Gilbert, yesterday I received a letter. You know how nervous and excitable I am. That letter nearly drove me mad. I could not rest. I fled from the house to weep out my despair alone under the black night sky. I forgot the flight of time—forgot everything but my own misery, and—you found me, Gilbert."

"Have you that letter?" he asked.

"I have."

"Show it to me!"

"Gilbert, pay me—forgive me! I have deceived you—deceived you from first to last! But my deception is at an end. Do with me in your anger as you will. Here is the fatal letter."

She drew a folded paper from her pocket. Gilbert Varneck, very, very pale, took it, opened and read it. It was written in a man's hand—a big, slap-dash fist—on the coarsest paper:

NEW YORK, Sept. 26th, 18—.

"DEAR NELL,—You'll open your big black eyes a little, I dare say, when they light on this, for I'm about the last chap alive you expected to hear from. You'll be glad to hear (or if you are not, you ought to be) that I'm out of limbo once more—time is up, and I'm as free as air. Of course, the first thing I did, on leaving the stone jug, was to inquire about the family. Judge of my grief on hearing the governor was dead—judge of my delight on hearing you had found your rich husband, and were living in the tallest sort of clover, down in Maryland! Now, my dear Nell, here's what's the matter—you've more money, I expect, than you know what to do with, and I haven't a rap—not a farthing to bless myself with; a very unfair division, as you must own. What I propose is this—you send me five thousand dollars immediately upon receipt of this, and I'll quit an ungrateful country and leave you in peace. You refuse, and by all the gods and god-

desses, I'll go down to Maryland, and I'll blow the family secret far and wide, and disgrace you forever, before your husband and his aristocratic relations! I'll be a drunkard and a thief, and—in short, I'll be as bad a scoundrel as I know how, and I leave you to guess what that means. Send me the money, or you'll be sorry. Don't send checks; they are troublesome things. Send a pile of bank-notes, by express, to the following address, and show yourself a loving sister to

“Your affectionate brother,

“JAMES GRAHAM.”

Colonel Varneck read this insolent epistle with a face of blank amaze.

“For Heaven's sake, Eleanor,” he said, “what does it all mean? ‘Your affectionate brother!’ What is the scoundrel thinking of? You have no brother.”

“I told you I had deceived you,” sobbed his wife, covering her face. “I have a brother—a half-brother, at least. I never told you before; I never would have told you, for he was the shame and disgrace of our family. He broke my poor mother's heart. I never expected to hear of him again in this world, and now he has come, in the hour of my happiness, to torment me and drive me wild!”

She sobbed hysterically. Gilbert listened, with a face of densest bewilderment, but yet of intense relief.

What was this to the vague, frightened doubts that had been making his existence a misery?

“Eleanor, be calm,” he said. “Tell me all about this. There is no need of all these tears—tell me about this brother.”

“He was my mother's son by her first husband,” Mrs. Varneck sobbed. “She was married twice. From his very boyhood he was vicious and reckless and unprincipled—the worst boy I ever knew. As he grew up, his vices grew with him; he was a liar, a thief, and a drunkard. Still my poor mother bore with him, still my kind father would not cast him off. Finally, a year or two before I met you, he committed a most daring burglary, was detected, tried, and sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment at hard labor. I never spoke of him to you—I could not, Gilbert; and, besides, my father had forbidden our ever mentioning his degraded name. There is his story. How he ever came to discover mine, Heaven knows, but discover it he has. Do you wonder now that, receiving that horrible letter yesterday, I nearly went

mad with shame and terror? Gilbert, I shall die if that wretch comes here!"

She uttered the last words with a frantic cry. Colonel Varneck soothed her as he might a child.

"Be content, my Eleanor; he shall not come. Why, you foolish little woman, is this your terrible secret of guilt and despair—the fearful mystery you dare not tell me?"

He smiled brightly down upon her, unutterably relieved.

She could not meet that frank, honest smile—she hid her guilty, false face for very shame.

"Is it not enough? Would he not disgrace me for life by coming here? Think of your mother's pride—think of the neighbors' gossip! Oh, it drives me deranged only to fancy it!"

"Don't fancy it, then. We shall not let him come."

"But, Gilbert, the alternative—the insolent, presumptuous wretch! You know it is simply impossible."

"What! to close a vile mouth with a bribe? Not in the least impossible! I would give, willingly, gladly, five thousand, ten thousand dollars rather than suffer again what you have made me suffer since last night. We will send this black sheep the money he asks for, and then we will forget him. And, Nelly, my dear, foolish wife, you must promise never to have a secret from me again."

She flung her arms around him and burst out into a hysterical storm of weeping. They were not false tears this time. She was wrought up to the highest pitch of hysterical emotion. The generosity of the man she loved, and was so basely deluding, touched her to the core of her heart.

"How good you are—how good you are!" she cried, hysterically; "and to such a false, wicked creature as I am! Oh, Gilbert! will I ever be worthy of such love as yours?"

"Hush, my darling! these are idle words between us. Compose yourself. It troubles me more than I can say to see you in this wildly excited state. There, be calm; try to sleep. I will leave you now. To-morrow morning I will place the five thousand dollars in your hands, and we will blot from our memory this unpleasant little episode. For the future, Gilbert Varneck's wife must have no secrets."

He laid her among the pillows with a fond, parting caress and quitted the room; and once again the crafty, conspiring woman was left alone with her maddening remorse.

Colonel Varneck was prompt to keep his word. Next day at noon, as she sat alone at the piano, he handed her a package done up in brown paper, with a smile.

“A gag for your tell-tale brother, Nelly. Send it off as soon as may be, and tell him your husband knows all, and that if he dares to show himself here, we’ll horsewhip him into the Chesapeake.”

Without waiting to be thanked, save by one eloquent look, he was gone, and Mrs. Varneck was triumphant. She held in her hand the price of one year’s peace.

Early next morning the carriage was ordered, and Eleanor Varneck drove rapidly to the city. There, with her own hands, she dispatched her valuable parcel, but not directed to Mr. James Graham.

* * * * *

Captain Dandid received his five thousand dollars, and laughed aloud in his triumph as he counted over the crisp bank-notes.

“You’re a wonderful woman, my Adelia!” he said to himself—“a woman in ten thousand! Now, how did you manage to beg, borrow, or steal this, I wonder? My poor colonel—my poor confiding, gullible colonel! You are to be pitied. But I’ll keep my promise to you, nevertheless. You shall have your handsome wife for the next eight years, supposing your handsome wife is a lady of her word. I dare say she has been puzzling her pretty head in vain, many a time, to discover the cause of the eight years’ amnesty. Ah, my lady, you don’t know the story of Dora Dalton, of my pretty Fairy, and how I tricked you there, or of our bright little Launce Lauriston. In eight years those children will be young ladies, and my smart little Launce a bright-eyed doctor, and marriageable. The blow that strikes you will be all the sharper for your eight years’ peace. By the bye, I think I can afford to run down East and see my interesting protégées.”

With the cool captain to decide was to act. A week later, and with all his affairs in New York settled, he was on his way to Massachusetts—to Silver Shore. And late one blustery October afternoon the train set him down at the lonely station, the only passenger for the stagnant little village. Captain Dandin refreshed himself after his dusty journey by a luxurious bath and dinner at the hotel before starting for the cottage. The long village road was quite deserted as he walked along; lights twinkled already in the gray October gloaming from the cottage windows; the dead leaves, russet and red, whirled in drifts about him in the shrill autumn blast. No other sound, no other sights broke the dead monotony of the place.

“ ‘And I said, if there’s peace to be found in this world,
A heart that is humble might hope for it here,’ ”

quoted the captain, internally. “And yet that pretty sentiment is only bosh, after all. Don’t we read every day of murders done in peaceful fields under the waving trees, of robberies committed in little out-of-the-way villages, of all the horrors of the vilest city purlieus perpetrated in rustic hamlets by the artless dwellers therein? Yes, human nature is the same in the green country lanes and reeking city alleys—vile, vile, vile!”

The pretty white cottage among the climbing roses and sweet-brier was sparkling with light as the captain opened the little gate. The roses were all dead now, and only bare brown stalks rattled in the wind, but the cheery light of fire and lamp streamed ruddily out into the bleak gloaming. The shop window was quite dazzling with its brave display of ribbons and roses, and caps and bonnets, and dolls and picture-books, and fancy ware generally.

Captain Dandin’s knock was answered by a trim little maid, who ushered him at once into the parlor, where Mrs. Lauriston and her son sat at tea. Mother and son arose with a simultaneous cry of surprise and pleasure at sight of their visitor.

“Now, don’t disturb yourselves—don’t, I beg!” cried the captain, imploringly. “Go on with your supper, and I’ll sit here by this cozy fire and warm myself. No, no, nothing for me; I dined half an hour ago at the hotel. You didn’t expect me, did you? Ah! I couldn’t quit the country without running down to see how my little doctor got on. Have you fully realized the change yet, Mrs. Lauriston?”

He shook hands heartily, forced them back to their seats at the table, and spread out his boots to the genial influence of the blaze.

Very cozy looked the little parlor with its bright fire, its clean lamp, its neat supper-table so bountifully spread.

Captain Dandin actually felt a glow of unselfish pleasure as he glanced around and thought: “All this is my work.”

“And how well you both are looking!” he said—“positively ten per cent. better than when I saw you last. I thought the country air and the new milk and fresh butter would work wonders. And how does the nice little shop?”

The nice little shop did miraculously. The business had increased so greatly, even in the short time Mrs. Lauriston had been there, that she had been obliged to engage a servant

to do the household work and a little damsel to attend behind the counter.

Her own time was fully occupied in making up the pretty caps, and bonnets, and collars, and sleeves, and so forth, of the Silver Shore maids and matrons.

Her dark eyes sparkled, and her color rose with such an enthusiastic flush as she told him, that she looked ten years younger and prettier in a moment.

"By Jove! she's handsomer than the other one," thought the captain. "Dress her up in silks and jewels, give her back the husband of her youth, and she'll eclipse her completely. There's a look in this face that Adelia Lyon never wore, and never will wear to her dying day—a pure and passionless heart, shining through pure and passionless eyes."

"And our little doctor—how does he?" he asked.

"First rate," called Launce, boyishly—"splendid, I tell you, captain! I go to school every day, and I'm up head in all my classes, and I study like a brick at home—don't I, mother?—and I help 'tend in the shop when Maria's off duty; and, oh, Captain Dandin! I can swim like a fish already, and row, and climb trees like a squirrel. And Mr. Seltzer—he keeps the drug store down the village—he says when I leave school, he'll take me and teach me the business; and that's a long step toward learning to be a doctor. And, I tell you, this here Silver Shore is just the jolliest place out, quiet as it looks, and I wouldn't go back to Boston to live—no, not if you made me a present of it!"

"Launce! Launce!" his mother said, laughing, "how you run on! What will Captain Dandin think of you?"

"What I thought before—that he's a brave little hero! Ah! I foresee that we shall have a physician one of these days that will make all the great medical guns of the old world and the new look to their laurels. Stick to your books, my lad, and mind your mother, and the world is all your own, to be what you like."

Captain Dandin lingered a week at Silver Shore—a long, pleasant week. It was like a breathing-spell in the battle of life, and the man shook off his cynicism and his cold-blooded selfishness and let himself be happy—simply and honestly happy, like better men.

He departed, with munificent presents to Launce of a pony and a watch, and laden with the blessings of mother and son.

"You're a happier woman than your sister," he thought, as he looked his last upon her tearful, earnest face. "She has wealth and luxury, and the man you both love, and you

are but a poor widow, but you are ten thousand-fold the happier woman of the two. Speaking of Mrs. Varneck, I've half a mind to give her one parting shock before I quit the country; and I'll do it, by Jove!"

* * * * *

At Glen Gower preparations went rapidly on for the departure of the family. Little Dora was to be placed at a boarding-school in New York, and her father was to take her.

Mrs. Varneck parted with her only child very calmly indeed; she felt kindly toward the little girl, nothing more. She felt far more keenly the brief separation of two weeks from her husband than the separation of two years from her daughter.

They were to depart almost immediately upon the return of the colonel, Mme. Varneck with them. The house was to be left in charge of a trusty person, and all necessary preparations were made.

It was the evening of Colonel Varneck's return. He had telegraphed to them from Washington, and was coming in the last train. The carriage was to meet him at Baltimore, and the drive would occupy some three hours. It would, therefore, be past eleven when he arrived.

Mme. Varneck retired, and recommended her daughter-in-law to do the same; but Mrs. Gilbert insisted upon sitting up for her husband. It was their first separation, and the two weeks had been very long and joyless without him in the big, rambling old mansion. She was in a fever of longing and expectation to-night, and pulled out her watch perpetually to look at the hour.

Eleven came—in half an hour he would be with her. She grew too feverishly impatient to wait in the house, and, throwing a crimson opera-cloak about her, she went out into the starlit night.

A silver sickle glanced in the sky; countless stars sparkled; a soft wind stirred the trees; a holy hush of night wrapped earth and sea.

Something of the mild beauty of the scene penetrated her heart—a sense of exultant joy filled it. Was not all she had longed for hers at last? She was safe—for eight long years, at least—and the man she worshiped was all her own.

"I have triumphed!" she thought, exultantly. "I have every desire of my heart! Henceforth my life shall be one long summer holiday."

She wandered down a rustic path leading to the gate. Tall white statues gleamed here and there in the moonlight like

pallid ghosts. She paused by one—a statue of Niobe—in a sudden panic of affright, as her quick eye detected a movement and a rustle in the shrubbery.

An instant later and a supernaturally tall figure glided from among the trees and stood before her. A long, dark cloak shrouded it, and a wide-brimmed hat shadowed the face.

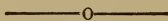
Without a word it stood stock still, slowly raised the hat, and a face was plainly revealed in the moonlight—the face of a dead man—the face of Gerald Rosslyn!

“Murderess, beware!”

Hollow and unnatural came the awful words. Stock still she stood, rooted to the spot, frozen there with horror. An instant the dreadful vision confronted her, then slowly, slowly it glided backward among the trees and disappeared.

Colonel Varneck, driving rapidly up the avenue ten minutes later, beheld a prostrate figure in a white dress and scarlet shawl lying on the grass. To spring out, to raise it up, to recognize, with unutterable consternation, the rigid face of his wife, was but the work of an instant.

She had fallen there in a dead swoon, as white and senseless as the statue of Niobe by which she lay.



PART II.



CHAPTER 1.

MISS EUDORA VARNECK.

MOONLIGHT on earth and ocean—moonlight flooding the purple bosom of the midnight sea—moonlight glorifying the peaceful little village of Silver Shore; trees murmuring drowsily in the soft July wind; flowers asleep under the sparkling stars; heaven and earth and sea radiant with moonlight and summer beauty.

The young girl who stood on the piazza gazing on this tranquil brightness was as fair herself as the picture on which she gazed—great, bright blue-gray eyes, profuse, shining auburn hair “done up” elaborately in the latest style, and a rosy face of eighteen years, so brightly pretty that it was a pleasure to look at it.

She was all in white, filmy and floating with misty lace, and sparkling jewels shimmering in the moonlight. An opera-cloak of soft scarlet stuff draped her loosely and set off the snowy robes and tinsel hair—a pretty girl and prettily

gressed—a Southern heiress, just emancipated from a New York boarding-school after eight weary years—Miss Eudora Varneck, of Glen Gower.

The house on whose front piazza she stood was all ablaze with illumination—all ringing with merry dance-music. It was Squire Rayfield's—Squire Rayfield, the great magnate of Silver Shore—whose daughter and only child had that day been married.

There had been a stately breakfast after the ceremony, and the blissful pair had departed on their bridal-tour, and now the old squire, in the happiness of his heart, was entertaining all his old friends with a "danceable tea."

And Miss Eudora Varneck, the pretty Maryland heiress, had been first bride-maid on the auspicious occasion, and was to remain the squire's guest for weeks to come, until papa and mamma and grandmamma should return from that prolonged European tour of eight years.

They had been school-mates and inseparable friends—Julia Rayfield and Eudora Varneck—and the usual promise had passed—whoever married first, the other must be bride-maid.

She had been scarcely a week at Silver Shore as yet, and it was her first glimpse of society, but she had already managed to distract all the eligible young men for miles around.

She stood leaning against a slender, vine-wreathed column now, wonderfully fair in the dancing moon-rays, looking with dreamy, wistful eyes far over the shining sea.

"And in three weeks," she thought, "they will be here—papa, mamma, grandmamma. Ah! what a weary time it is since I saw them last—eight long years! Have they missed me, I wonder, as I have missed them? My stately, handsome papa, whom I loved so dearly, whose letters have been my one delight in all those years, to think that in three weeks I shall meet you again! And my beautiful Maryland home! how heart-sick I have grown for one glimpse of it, often and often, in that forlorn old boarding-school! What a checkered life mine has been—only eighteen, and so eventful! The miserable hovel where my childhood was spent, carrying gin and tobacco for Granny Croak; the dark, beautiful lady who took me away and told me she was my mother; stately Glen Gower with its undreamed-of splendor; my hero of a father; my queenly grandmamma. Then the dull routine of boarding-school life; then this pretty village; and now, best of all, home again in a month. Thank Heaven! the life that is past can never return—neither the horrors of Granny Croak nor the wretched dullness of school. I am glad I am Eudora Var-

neck, heiress of Glen Gower, and I would not be any one else for the world!"

"Found at last!" exclaimed a voice behind her. "We thought it was the story of the old oak chest over again, with the bride-maid for heroine instead of the bride, and

"The highest, the lowest, the loneliest spot,' we've searched for Miss Varneck, and found her not. Are you composing an epic on 'Moonlight on the Ocean,' Miss Eudora?"

Eudora turned round and saw a young man got up regardless of expense.

"Hardly, Mr. Lansdown; I'm not clever enough to compose anything; but, if I were an artist, I would certainly paint this exquisite scene and immortalize myself. Have they sent you in search of me? I did not think I would be missed."

"As if the moon could drop out of the sky yonder and not be missed! There have been a dozen calls for you to sing. Shall we let them call a little longer, or shall we go in?"

"We will go in, I think."

She passed on before him a little hastily. She had no desire for a solitary *tête-à-tête* by moonlight with this slender young man—one of her "stricken deer." Throwing her scarlet drapery in a glowing heap upon a sofa, she shook out her silver plumage and floated into the long drawing-room.

A gay group of girls, surrounded, of course, by a bevy of young men, stood near the door-way, and the "bright, particular star" of the evening was hailed at once.

"Oh, here she is!" cried a girlish voice, "and just in time. Have you ever had any hair-breadth 'scapes by flood or field, Eudora? Because, if you have, you are more fortunate than the rest of us. We are comparing notes, we girls, and we find there isn't a heroine among us. Not one of us ever had anything more thrilling happen than being thrown out of a buggy or shut in solitary confinement at school. And as for heroes—bah! There are no Sir Launcelots nowadays. The young men are all alike—dye their mustaches, part their hair down the middle, and do nothing. Have you ever had an adventure?"

A dozen pairs of laughing eyes turned upon the Maryland heiress. To their surprise, a lovely, sensitive flush dyed her cheeks, and the pretty face turned suddenly grave.

"She has, I declare!" chorused two or three voices; "only look at her! Oh, do tell us what it was—runaway slaves, midnight assassins, or what?"

"Neither," said Miss Varneck, "and yet you are quite

night. I have had an adventure—I have been within a hair's-breadth of losing my life. The most horrible of all deaths stared me in the face, and at the last supreme moment my hero came and snatched me away. There are Sir Launcelots in the world still, and he was one."

"Oh, tell us all about it!" was the breathless cry. "Who was he? How did it happen? Was he young? Was he handsome?"

Miss Varneck laughed, with that bright, flitting color coming and going in her sensitive face.

"Yes, to both questions; my hero was young and handsome. Who he was I don't know. How it happened was this. You all remember that dreadful riot-week, some years ago, in New York?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I had been out of health that summer, and Clara Gore, one of my special friends, who had left school, invited me to come and accompany them to their country house in the Highlands. Madame permitted me on account of my health; and, as the distance was nothing, I traveled alone. I reached the city late in the afternoon, and found everything in a state of appalling confusion—the dreadful riot had begun, and men and women seemed to be going mad.

"How I ever got to Mr. Gore's house I don't know—I was nearly beside myself with terror; but I did get there, to find the family fled in dismay, and no one in the house but a couple of servants. Mr. Gore was still in town, the head of those who strove to put down the mob, and one of the most unpopular men in the city. He was absent when I arrived, but was hourly expected. I went up to my room to await his return, trembling with horror at the dreadful cries and yells from the streets. I dared not look out. I sat crouched in a corner, wild with fear, and wishing—oh, how I wished I had never left school! Ah! I was not much of a heroine—very little of a Grace Darling or a Joan d'Arc.

"Night came—a night of untold horrors—and brought Mr. Gore. He looked pale and fagged; but he was full of pity for poor little me.

"'Try to keep up heart a few hours longer, my dear,' he said. 'Go to bed and sleep, if you can. Before day-break tomorrow you will be safe with Clara.'

"I went back to my own room, but not to bed—not to sleep. I did not even undress. I cowered away in the remotest corner, with my hands over my ears to shut out the appalling noises without. The night wore on somehow—that

dreadful summer night—made horrible by the demoniac yells from the streets. It was drawing near midnight, I think, and I had dropped into a sort of doze, when a frightful uproar of hooting, yelling, and screeching awoke me. I started up, broad awake, to find the room full of red, glaring light and stifling smoke. I rushed to the window. There, below, howled a maddened mob, armed with bludgeons and guns, and all around me the house was in flames.

“ ‘Death to the villain Gore!’ ‘Shoot him down like a dog!’ ‘Burn him and his vipers’ nest out!’ were some of the awful cries that met my ears.

“The flames were spreading. I flew to the door and ran wildly out; but corridors and stair-ways were one sheet of flame, that met and drove me back. Again I returned to the chamber—to the window. I threw it open and leaned far out.

“ ‘Save me!’ I cried, wildly. ‘Oh, for God’s sake, save my life—save my life!’

“A madder yell than ever answered me. The red glare of the fire rendered me plainly conspicuous to that maddened crowd.

“ ‘Let her burn!’ roared a horrible voice. ‘Death to Gore and all of his house!’

“ ‘Fiends!’ shouted a clear voice that rang like a trumpet above the uproar. ‘You ought to be burned alive, every man of you! I’ll save that woman or I’ll perish with her!’

“I heard no more—the smoke was beginning to stifle me. The door crashed in; two strong arms caught me and wrapped me in something—two strong arms bore me through smoke and flame to the outer air. I shall never forget the frenzied yells that greeted us; but my preserver dashed on like a whirlwind until the street was left and we were alone together in a quiet alley. There he set me down, and I looked in his face for the first time.”

“And he was young and handsome?” chirped one of Miss Varneck’s pretty listeners.

Eudora looked at her, and her whole face lighted and shone.

“He looked like a king—he looked like a demi-god! I have never seen his equal before or since. We stood there for an instant under the peaceful stars, while the hootings and yells came to us from the street we had left, and the midnight sky was all aglow with the red light of the fire.

“ ‘You are safe, young lady,’ said my hero. ‘What am I to do with you now?’

“I held out both hands to him as a frightened child might to its mother.

“ ‘Take me back to school!’ I said, with a hysterical sob. ‘Oh, I shall die—I shall die!’ ”

“ ‘Let us hope not. Where is your school?’ ”

“ I gave him the address of our Harlem pension, and he drew my arm under his and led me away at a rapid walk. I don’t know where we went or how he managed, but he got a carriage, and then we were whirling over the ground back to Harlem. He never once addressed me during the ride. He sat, looking stern as doom, all the way, and I, trembling and shivering, eyed him askance and was afraid to speak. Shall I ever forget that wild, midnight ride? We reached the school as morning grew gray, and my preserver’s thundering knock startled madame and her pupils out of their matutinal sleep. The door was opened; madame, scared and bewildered, appeared; half a dozen brief sentences, and my hero had told all, had lifted me out of the carriage, and passed me over to my rightful protectress. I was safe, and he was gone. I never saw him from that day to this. ”

Miss Varneck paused. She was very pale now, and her eyes were glistening.

A chorus of feminine exclamations followed. The men stood silent, each looking as though he wished he had been her “hero.”

“ How nice—how interesting! Why, Eudora, you are really a heroine, only the romance doesn’t end right. By all the laws, poetical and romantic, your hero should turn out to be the son of poor but honest parents, fall madly in love with you, and you with him, be rejected with rage and scorn by Papa Varneck, and end by a moonlight elopement with his heiress. To think you never saw him again—never even thanked him then—don’t know his name! Why, he may possibly be a married man. Oh, it’s disgraceful! ”

“ Perfectly, ” said young Lansdown. “ Meantime, Miss Clifford, here’s the waltz you promised me; so, if you can cease weaving romances long enough—come. ”

The group dispersed. Miss Varneck, too, was turning away with a young man who claimed her hand for the dance, when she suddenly stopped stock still, her great eyes dilated, her face flushed, then turned ashen pale. She stood like a statue, her breath fluttering, her color coming and going.

“ What in the world is it? ” her partner exclaimed, aghast. “ You don’t see the Marble Guest, do you, Miss Varneck? ”

He looked where she looked, and saw—only a tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed, handsome young man entering and sauntering up to Mrs. Rayfield to pay his respects. But it was the

entrance of this young man that had electrified the Maryland heiress.

"Who is it?" she said, in a breathless sort of way. "Oh, who is it?"

"Eh?" cried her partner, staring. "You don't mean that man shaking hands with Mrs. Rayfield, do you? Why, that's only Doctor Lauriston—the Young Doctor, as they call him here, in contradistinction to all the other medical gentlemen, who verge on the elderly. That's Doctor Launcelot Lauriston, of Silver Shore, just home after taking his degree, and a most uncommon fine fellow, I must say. His mother keeps the fancy store down the village. You must have been in it, I'm certain, before this."

Miss Varneck listened to this commonplace detail with breathless interest, her eyes still fixed on the handsome stranger, that lovely, fluttering blush still coming and going, all unconscious of the wondering eyes fixed upon her.

"You don't know Lauriston, do you?" he said, suspiciously. "I don't see where you could ever have met him, Miss Varneck."

Eudora drew a long, fluttering breath, and "beauty's bright, transient glow" burned deep red on her cheeks.

"No," she said, hastily, "I don't know him. I have kept you waiting. I beg your pardon. Shall we go now, Mr. Grant?"

"I'll present Lauriston, with your permission, Miss Varneck," said Mr. Grant. "He'll be asking for an introduction in ten minutes."

The young lady laughed.

"You had better wait until he asks, then, Mr. Grant. See, we are losing our waltz. Come."

They whirled away, but all through the dance the bright eyes of the pretty heiress kept furtive watch on the handsome stranger.

He was very handsome, grand and stalwart despite his youth, and he looked little more than twenty.

The keen blue eyes of the gentleman spied her out, too, very speedily. It was scarcely likely the prettiest girl in the room, and the only stranger, would long escape that vivid glance.

The dance concluded, her partner led her to a seat and went away for an ice. At the same instant Mrs. Rayfield approached on the young stranger's arm.

"Eudora, my dear, let me make two of our particular fa-

avorites acquainted with each other. Miss Varneck, my young friend, Doctor Lauriston."

Dr. Lauriston bowed low, Miss Varneck smiled brightly, and Mrs. Rayfield swept away.

"How fashionably late you arrive, Doctor Lauriston," the young lady said, gayly. "I saw you enter a moment ago."

"It is necessity, unfortunately, in my case," Dr. Lauriston replied. "I only reached the village by the last train, found the squire's invitation awaiting me, and hastened to present myself at once. I have been in New York for the past five months."

"Indeed? Not your first visit to that city, I think?"

"No," said the young man, looking rather surprised. "New York has been my permanent abiding-place latterly, but I was not aware Miss Varneck knew that."

Miss Varneck smiled, fluttered her fan, and looked saucy.

"I am afraid Doctor Lauriston has forgotten me, and yet we have met before, and in New York. My memory is better than his, it appears."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the young doctor. "I beg your pardon, Miss Varneck, but I am certain, if I had ever met you, I could not have forgotten. Besides, I did not go into society. I was studying hard. Are you sure you do not mistake me for some one else?"

"Quite sure, sir. I knew you the instant you entered. Let me refresh your memory. It was some years ago this month."

"Some years ago!" looking hopelessly bewildered. "I am very stupid, I am afraid, but I really don't recollect the circumstance. And yet I have a good memory for faces, too. Some years ago I met you in New York, Miss Varneck? Quite unpardonable of me, but I can not recall it."

The bright, mischievous eyes were fixed upon his perplexed face, dancing with fun.

"And yet you did me a great favor at the time—the greatest you could possibly render me. Try and recall it, Doctor Lauriston—a hooting, yelling, murderous mob, a house in flames, a young girl left to perish, a heroic stranger rushing through maddened men and devouring fire to—"

"Hush!" cried Dr. Lauriston, energetically. "Not a word more! I see it all now. And you were that young girl? I accuse myself," he said, penitently, "of never even looking in her face."

Eudora Varneck rose up, flushing deeply, her eloquent eyes suffused—a lovely vision—holding out both white hands.

"I did not thank you then, my preserver. Let me thank

you now. I owe you my life. You did for me that night what few men alive would have done—you risked your life for mine.”

She laid the two white hands in his, with those glistening tears in her eyes. She was a very tender-hearted little girl, no doubt, and a very grateful one, but she was also as sentimental as young ladies of eighteen or nineteen usually are, and if the preserver of her life had been the amiable owner of a pug nose and lantern jaws, we greatly doubt whether the tears would have started so readily, or the dainty palms been given so impulsively.

Dr. Lauriston, coloring vividly with pleasure and surprise, did exactly the right thing—lifted one of those snow-flakes of hands and kissed it.

“This is the happiest moment of my life! But, dear Miss Varneck, don’t spoil that pleasure by ever thanking me again.”

Their eyes met in one brief, eloquent gaze. She drew her hands away, blushing vividly, and he— With that look the boy’s free heart went out from Launcelot Lauriston, never to return.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE MAPLES.

MISS VARNECK stood on the front portico of Squire Rayfield’s handsome house, bathed in the amber glory of the summer morning sunshine. Wonderfully pretty looked the little Maryland heiress, with all those bright coils of red-brown hair twisted round her pretty head, her dark-blue riding-habit and sweeping white plume setting off the fair, roseate skin and dancing, blue-gray eyes.

She stood holding up her sweeping skirt in one daintily gauntleted hand, the other posing her toy riding-whip, while Squire Rayfield’s groom led around her spirited chestnut mare.

She was a good rider—this bright little Eudora—and looked, as all pretty girls must look, her best in a side-saddle.

“Off for a gallop, Dora?” a hearty voice behind her said. “And who’s the happy man this time, eh?”

Eudora turned round and saw the jovial squire.

“Doctor Lauriston, sir.”

“Humph! Launcelot, eh? It’s always Doctor Lauriston of late, isn’t it? Well, he’s a fine fellow—a stalwart, handsome, six-foot giant, with a character as sound as his constitution;

and if you were a daughter of mine, you might ride with Doctor Lauriston to your heart's content. But you're Colonel Varneck's daughter, and the heiress of Glen Gower, and—it won't do, my dear—it won't do."

Miss Varneck reddened to the roots of her shining hair, but her only answer was an impatient "Pooh!" as she ran down the front steps and let the groom assist her to mount.

At the same instant the young doctor, astride a powerful black horse, cantered up to the gate at full gallop.

Miss Varneck gave the chestnut her head, rode down the avenue, and the pair dashed off together in spirited style.

"Handsome couple, mother," the squire said to his wife, who joined him in the hall; "and that boy Launce is a mate for a princess—a glorious young fellow who will make his mark in the world, or I'm greatly mistaken. And she is only a very pretty and innocent girl; but, for all that, she is the heiress of the Varnecks, and, as I said before, it won't do. More's the pity."

"I'm afraid Eudora's a little of a coquette," Mrs. Rayfield remarked. "She has certainly encouraged young Lauriston in the most marked manner for the past fortnight. Why, they have been inseparable—riding, driving, walking, sailing. She stayed for tea three times at his mother's cottage, and came home on his arm by moonlight. What do you call that?"

"Courting, my dear, in our time," replied the squire. "I don't know the name of it now. He's too good a boy and too clever a fellow to lose himself for a girl as far out of his reach as yonder shining sun. I'm glad she's going home."

"Too late," said Mrs. Rayfield, shaking her head and moving off. "The mischief's done, depend upon it."

Mrs. Rayfield was right. It was too late, and the mischief was done. Launcelot Lauriston was countless fathoms deep in love with Eudora Varneck.

Mad presumption, surely, in the portionless son of the village milliner to lift his eyes to the great Maryland heiress. But the impetuous son of the village milliner never thought of that. When does headstrong twenty years ever stop to think?

And the Maryland heiress smiled so sweetly, and blushed so brightly, and was so unutterably gentle and gracious that—ah! a stronger head than Launcelot Lauriston's might have been turned.

And she—but who can read the heart of a girl of eighteen? He was handsome and grand as a king, in his royal young man-

hood, and he had saved her life, and he was a gentleman, from the crown of his curly head to the sole of his foot, and it would be no hard matter for even a fabulous heiress to give the world for love and Launcelot Lauriston, and think it well lost.

They dashed along over the pleasant country roads, up breezy hill-sides, over slopes of meadow-land, and down on the shining white sands that gave the place its name.

Eudora drew up her horse for a moment to gaze over the sparkling sea, glittering in the sunshine, until it lost itself in the blue horizon line.

"How beautiful it is! how grand! how glorious! I love the sea, Doctor Lauriston, and I am thankful my own beautiful Maryland home is on the shores of the broad Chesapeake. Look at Pirate's Rock over yonder," pointing with her whip to a tiny island. "It's like an emerald set in sapphire. Julia Rayfield and I used to take the dory and row ourselves over almost every day to gather the bright red berries that grow there. They are like coral, and make the prettiest wreaths imaginable. Julia used to crown her black hair with them. I mean to take a basketful when I go home—as relics, you know."

"When you go home!"

Dr. Lauriston turned upon her suddenly, with startled eyes, at the words.

"Certainly. You don't think I mean to dawdle away the remainder of my life here like this, do you? I am going home, and that very soon. The steamer that brings papa and mamma from their long European sojourn was due in New York two days ago. I ought surely get a letter by this evening's mail."

The young man listened, growing very pale. The lightly spoken words sounded like his death-knell.

"And you will never return? We may never meet again?"

"Let us hope for better things," Miss Varneck said, with that infinite calm girls all can assume. "I certainly hope to return here some time and see how married life agrees with Julia. And you—who knows?—you may come to Maryland sooner or later. If ever you do, I can promise the preserver of my life a cordial welcome at Glen Gower."

"You are very good."

But he said it with a moodiness all unwonted with him, and which the young lady understood perfectly.

A little conscious smile dimpled the pretty mouth. She

liked to feel her power—all women do—to see that handsome face darken and sadden at one word from her.

“Come, Sir Launcelot!” she exclaimed, gayly. “We are five miles from home, and the mail may arrive at any instant. Come—a race back.”

“You are very anxious for your letter, Miss Varneck.”

“Most undoubtedly, Doctor Lauriston—very anxious.”

“And equally anxious to leave Silver Shore, of course?” rather sulkily.

“I don’t perceive the ‘of course;’ but I shall be glad to get home. That is natural, I think, after eight years. And I will be glad to meet papa and mamma and grandmamma—equally natural, is it not? Yes, Doctor Lauriston, with them I will willingly leave even pleasant Silver Shore. Are you ready to return? Because Queen Bess is, like her mistress, impatient to be off.”

She dashed away as she spoke, and the passionate words on Launcelot’s lips were not destined to be uttered then. It gave him quite enough to do to keep up with the spirited chestnut and her equally spirited mistress.

But few had ever seen Launce Lauriston with so darkly moody a face as that. Not a word was spoken by either as they flew along at the top of their speed over the smooth high-road until the village was reached. There Miss Varneck drew rein a little.

As they swept past the fancy store, Mrs. Lauriston’s handsome face smiled upon them through the window, and Mrs. Lauriston’s slender hand was waved in greeting.

Those eight years had passed very lightly over the young doctor’s mother. She looked unmistakably fair and youthful to-day in her black silk dress, with her shining dark hair coiled gracefully away.

“What a handsome woman your mother is!” Miss Varneck exclaimed. “She must have been extremely beautiful in early youth. And the strangest thing of all is that she is the living image of my mother.”

“Indeed!”

“They might be twin sisters. The resemblance is something extraordinary. It struck me the first time I ever saw her; it strikes me every time I look at her since. The expression is different. Mamma is—how shall I say it?—colder, haughtier, more imperious; but the hair, the eyes, the height, the features, are precisely the same.”

“Odd!” remarked Launcelot. “In that case, Miss Var-

neck, you do not resemble your mother much. You take after your father, I presume?"

Eudora shook her head.

"No," she said. "Oh, no; I am not in the least like papa—not half so handsome. There, Doctor Lauriston, I will take that compliment I see coming for granted, and go on all the same. I am not at all like papa, but, stranger still, you are. There! that is a compliment for you."

"'You do me proud,' Miss Varneck; but in my case the resemblance, I fear, must be imaginary. It is surely impossible that my mother can be the exact image of yours, and I be the living prototype of your father."

"It sounds incredible, I confess; nevertheless, it is true. You do resemble papa strikingly. When he comes here for me you will see. Ah! home at last. Will you come up this evening, Doctor Lauriston?"

She asked the question carelessly, half turning in her saddle, as Queen Bess ambled up the leafy drive.

"With your kind permission, yes—to see whether you have received your letter. Until then, farewell."

He rode away at a swift gallop, the moody darkness settling on his face again. A chilling presentiment of what was to come had fallen upon him. For the first time he realized the impassable gulf between them.

"She is an heiress, the daughter of a proud race, and I—what am I?" he asked himself, bitterly—"a nameless dependent on the bounty of a stranger. And yet, in the sight of the Creator who made us, I am her equal, and Eudora Varneck shall hear me."

Mrs. Rayfield met Eudora on the threshold, with a letter in her hand.

"For you," she said. "The postman came not ten minutes ago. It is postmarked New York. Your parents have arrived."

The girl took it with a cry of delight.

"From grandmamma—dear, dear grandmamma! Oh, Mrs. Rayfield! to think I shall see them all again, after eight long years!"

She ran away to her room, tore the letter open at once, and read:

"MY DEAREST EUDORA,—At last, as you will see by the postmark, we have reached New York, and I, for one, tired nearly to death with the long sea voyage. Papa and mamma stand it like old sailors, but I never get used to the sea.

Thank Heaven, we are safe at home again, or almost so. I never wish to quit Glen Gower now, until I quit it in my coffin.

"Did I tell you in my last that we met my young kinsman, Lord Annesley, in Paris, and that he concluded to return with us? It is so, and your mamma and I travel to Maryland under his escort, while papa goes down East for his little girl. You will like Lord Annesley, I think—he is but little over thirty, well-looking, and the most thorough gentleman I ever met. And he is next heir to an earldom. He has seen our pretty Eudora's picture and her charming letters, and, in short, thinks so highly of her that I believe he has visited this country expressly to see her. How would grandmamma's pet like to be a countess? A coronet would become that graceful head, I think. But, there—I will say no more. Wait until you see him—let Fate do the rest. You should receive this on the 20th—on the 22d your father will be at Silver Shore to take you home. Ah! how I long to see my dear little granddaughter! With much love from all, I am, my dearest Eudora, your affectionate grandmother,

"AUGUSTA VARNECK."

Eudora Varneck read this letter over and over again, with eyes that flashed and cheeks that burned. A coronet! a countess! The letter dropped in her lap, and she went off into a rapturous dream of what might be.

A peeress of England—she could see herself in diamonds and lace, and sweeping train of richness, presented at Court—her daily home some grand old ivy-crowned castle, and she, herself, "my lady." How all the girls she knew would burn with bitterest envy! how her marriage would be chronicled in all the papers! what a sensation it would create! Why, it would be living a chapter out of one of her pet novels, and she would be a heroine for the first time in her life. Alas for Launcelot Lauriston! Not once did his image rise in those radiant dreams. She was only a girl—romantic, silly, if you like—and it was as natural as the air she breathed.

Miss Varneck, going down to dinner some time later with a luminous face, announced that on the second day after papa was coming to take her home. Mamma and grandmamma, under the escort of their relative, Lord Annesley, were already on their way to Glen Gower, she added, with an unconscious little uprising of the pretty head.

Mr. and Mrs. Rayfield expressed their regrets, but the squire, in reality, was greatly relieved. He liked this bright-

haired little heiress, but he liked the blue-eyed, handsome boy he had known from childhood better. And if the little heiress stayed much longer, the handsome, headstrong boy stood in imminent danger of having his happiness wrecked for life.

A couple of hours after dinner Eudora strolled away down along the maple walk to watch the sun go down, and wait for Dr. Lauriston. Under the maple-trees they had seen many suns set. Would they ever—she thought it with a little pang—would they ever watch another?

She heard the gallop of his horse along the silent, dusty road; she heard him vault off at the gate; she heard the quick, light tread crashing along the gravel. Her heart quickened its throbbing; she knew as well as that she stood there what was coming. An instant later, and he was by her side. But she never looked up. For the first time she shrunk from the gaze of those bold blue eyes—her own fixed on the crimson glory of the sinking sun.

“So absorbed in your thoughts and the sunset that you have not even a word of greeting for a friend, Miss Varneck?” he said, reproachfully.

She glanced up at him with a nervous little laugh, then back at the lurid splendor in the west.

“I am looking my last,” she said. “Who knows that I shall ever see the sun set again at Silver Shore?”

He grew deathly pale.

“Then your letter has come?” he said, slowly.

“I found it awaiting me—it is from grandmamma. Here, read it yourself, Doctor Lauriston, if you will.”

She took it carelessly from her pocket and handed it to him. Perhaps, all unknown to herself, a feeling of pride prompted the act.

She could not very well tell him those significant little hints of grandmamma’s about Lord Annesley, and it was something to let this presumptuous village doctor see that he was addressing a prospective peeress of the realm.

But Dr. Launcelot Lauriston was not in the least daunted by that impressive fact. He read the letter through with a set, stern face, and a hard, steely glitter in his frank blue eyes. He read it to the end and handed it back. Miss Varneck could see, in a fleeting side glance, how pale and fixed his face was.

“As we part so soon, it may not be premature to offer my congratulations now,” were his first words, hard and bitter.

“I presume I am addressing the future Lady Annesley?”

“Doctor Lauriston,” with a vivid blush, “how dare you?”

"I beg your pardon. You wished me to learn the fact when you gave me that letter to read, did you not? It would be against the rules and proprieties of young-ladydom to tell me in so many words. Very kind of you, indeed, Miss Varneck. At the same time, the kindness comes a little too late."

"Doctor Lauriston, have you gone mad? I don't know what you mean."

"Do you not? I'll endeavor to make it clearer, then. Have I gone mad? Something very like it, I begin to see; but a madness not of to-day, nor of yesterday. A madness of your making, Miss Eudora Varneck."

"Doctor Lauriston!"

She was trembling with excitement from head to foot—she could only stand there like a culprit, and falter his name.

"I am rude, am I not, Miss Varneck? Not in the least like that 'thorough gentleman,' Lord Annesley. I am a bear and a brute, for whom the bow-string would be too merciful. I am also a presumptuous madman, for I have dared lift my plebeian eyes to the patrician face of the heiress of Glen Gower, and love her."

She uttered a faint cry, and, covering her face with both hands, turned away.

"I love you, and you know it—have known it from the first. You drew me on with sweetest smiles, and honeyed words, and gracious condescension, to see, no doubt, how far the plebeian idiot's lunacy would carry him. You fooled me to the top of my bent, and now, Miss Varneck, the hour of your punishment has come, for you must stand here and listen to me tell it."

"I am sorry! I am sorry—"

Her voice choked in a tearless sob.

"No doubt. You all say that—you accomplished coquettes; it is part of the formula, I believe. And this is your first effort in that line, Miss Varneck. Really, it does you credit. A most accomplished flirt, 'out' half a dozen seasons, could hardly have succeeded better. You have been reading 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere' lately, I dare say, and you have been merely rehearsing the part. 'You thought to break a country heart for pastime,' ere you went to town, and you have succeeded tolerably well. Yes, Miss Varneck," folding his arms and standing erect all his magnificent six feet, with blazing blue eyes and death-white face, "the 'play is played out;' the madman is as mad as even you would have

him. I love you as I never will love another woman in this lower world."

The bitter voice stopped—the blazing eyes looked her full in the face.

She tried to look up; she tried to meet that rigid face with pride, with indignation. In vain. The sense of guilt weighed her down. She had been heartless—she had acted the part of a cruel coquette; and, worst of all, she loved him. Yes, if he had only known it—this passionate young lover—what she dared not now avow to her own frightened heart—the triumph was his, for she loved him.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Miss Varneck?" the hard, strident voice asked.

"Nothing"—she spoke coldly, roused at last, and looking away from him—"except good-bye."

He broke out into a laugh—a very madman's laugh—wild, mocking, mirthless.

"I have my answer. Lady Clara Vere de Vere has had her three weeks' pleasure, and young Laurence may go and cut his idiotic throat as soon as he pleases. Good-bye, Miss Varneck, by all means. You have taught me a sharp lesson—believe me, I shall not forget it. I wish Lord Annesley joy of his bride. The milliner's son and the heiress of Glen Gower—the future Countess of Annesley—part here, to meet again, as they are—*equals*, in the sight of the God who made them."

For an instant she dared look up in his inspired, glorified face; then he had turned and was striding down the dewy grass.

She made a step after him, with both hands outstretched.

"Stop, Launcelot! Don't go!"

But he was gone already out of sight and hearing, and she was alone with her dazzling prospective coronet and her undying remorse.

He went straight home—white and rigid and cold as death. The summer moon was rising, round and full, as he entered his mother's little parlor and flung himself, face downward, on a lounge. Higher and higher rose that placid moon, one by one the tremulous stars came out, and still the young man lay there as still as though death had quieted forever that impetuous heart doing battle with its first despair.

CHAPTER III.

ON PIRATE'S ROCK.

ANOTHER sunset, red and wrathful. The sun, a lurid, glaring ball, was going down in clouds blood red and inky black, over the placid sea smooth as glass; that red light in the sky shone with a fierce reflective glare.

Eudora Varneck stood on the white sands, looking over the wide sea with sorrowful blue eyes. She stood alone, where she and Launcelot Lauriston had often stood, side by side, as they never might stand again. She stood alone, this last evening at dear old Silver Shore, watching the lurid splendor of that sunset on the sea.

For she was very unhappy. She loved this handsome, passionate, impetuous boy-lover who had saved her life so daringly, and she had refused him and broken his heart.

She did not know, then, this poor little heiress, just emancipated from school, of what tough stuff men's hearts are made, and what merciless blows it takes to crack the adamant.

She loved him and she had refused him, and he was going mad, no doubt, in his misery, and he despised her, as she deserved to be despised. By and by, perhaps, he would forget her and marry some village beauty, and they would meet—she radiant in lace and jewels—Lady Annesley, perhaps, and she would drop down at his feet in a death-like swoon. It was so in all the novels she had read, and that gave her a dismal pleasure even in the depths of her sorrow and despair. Were not Medora, and Gulnare, and Zuleika, and the rest of them unspeakably unhappy young women? and had not the ambition of her life been to be one of them—wretched and broken-hearted, too? She had the desire of her heart now, and nothing was left her but to make the most of it.

“I will never see *him* again,” mused Miss Varneck—she always thought of Dr. Lauriston in *italics*, now; “and if papa and grandmamma insist upon my marrying Lord Annesley, of course I must marry him. But I will never love him, never, never! and he will carry a Marble Bride to his ancestral home, and no one will ever know the reason of my tearless despair. Oh, how cruel and wicked *he* must think me! and I almost wish, for his sake, I had been born a poor girl and not a great heiress. If I were one of his mother's apprentices, now, we could love each other and get married and live in one

of those dear little cottages yonder, with the red doors and green blinds, and I could cook his dinner, and iron his shirts, and sweep and dust our little parlor, while he attended his patients, and be as happy as the day is long. But I am Eudora Varneck, of Glen Gower, and not a little apprentice, and it can never, never, never be!"

The dismal pleasure in her own despair deepened, and Miss Varneck enjoyed her gloomy thoughts immensely, without knowing it.

Could Jane Erye, or Edith Dombey, or Little Em'ly, or any of her especial pets, be more delightfully wretched than this?

She sauntered slowly up and down the lonely sands, looking at the red light in the sky, and the reflected glitter in the calm water. How cruelly beautiful it all was, and this her last night!

All at once the memory of the relics she was to take away flashed upon her—the coral berries from Pirate's Rock.

"And when I am far away—in England, maybe, living a life of dazzling misery, I will look at them, and think of the happy time gone forever!" thought this romantic little girl.

She glanced around. The late Miss Julia Rayfield's pretty little pleasure-boat danced up and down with the long, lazy swell, a few yards off. The oars lay across the thwarts, the little sail was furled, and Eudora could manage the painted toy like a fisherman. Often and often she and Julia had rowed themselves to Pirate's Rock for the scarlet berries, in the first days of her coming, before the hero of her life had appeared to transform the world. Now she would go again for the last time. She looked at the sky, but the wrathful splendor of that red sunset told nothing to her inexperienced eyes.

"It will be moonlight," she thought, "and I can sail home by moonlight."

She unfastened the dory, pushed off, took the oars, and struck out. The distance was little over half a mile at ebb tide, as now, and she could easily make the rock in twenty minutes.

The wind had died out; an ominous calm lay over earth and sea; the black, glancing water was like glass. The hardiest fisherman along the coast would not have ventured out this sultry July evening on which the unlucky little heiress thoughtlessly risked her life.

Pirate's Rock was a tiny island, large enough for a pleasant promenade at low tide, but quite overflowed at high water and

in violent storms. Stunted furze grew beneath the rocks, and little bunches of bright-red berries dotted the rank, sea-weedy grass. Blue rockets and flame-colored flowers rocked in the wild sea wind. A weird, lonely place at all times, doubly weird and lonely now, in the hush of the summer evening, and in the fierce glare of the blood-red sky.

But still Eudora dreamed not of danger. She ran the dory in a tiny inlet, moored it securely, as she thought, to an overhanging boulder, and tripped away up the rocky slope.

The exercise of rowing had tired her, and she sat down among the rank grass, took off her hat, and laid her pretty head thoughtfully against the grim blue rock. And once again her thoughts veered away to the lover she had lost.

"I wonder if Lord Annesley is half as handsome?" was her girlish fancy. "Grandmamma says he is 'well looking,' but that is a stupid phrase, and I dare say he has a broad, round, English face, with horrid red cheeks and sandy side-whiskers. I know I shall hate him."

She drew forth grandmamma's letter and reread it. As she replaced it in her pocket, the sudden darkness that had fallen struck her. She looked up at the sky; all the crimson glory of the sunset had died out; a pall of inky black covered the west, lighted up here and there with blood-red bars. A wild rack of storm-clouds scudded across the sky; a low, ominous moan that wrinkled the dark waters told of the rising wind. Even the girl's inexperienced eyes could not fail to read these signs.

"There is a storm coming," she thought. "I must make haste."

She never dreamed of looking at the boat. The first fierce puff of the rising gale had loosened her ill-tied knot, and the little white dory was serenely drifting away upon the swelling tide.

Taking her hat for a basket, Eudora knelt down to gather her berries. It was slow work. Tall, coarse, reedy grass hid them, and with every passing instant the darkness deepened and wind and water rose. The sea-gulls screamed shrilly, and went eddying round in dizzy circles on the very crest of the waves. Every second made her danger more deadly; and still she knelt there and gathered her relics, her fatal red berries.

A vivid flash of lightning, leaping out like a two-edged sword, was her first warning of doom. She sprung to her feet with a scream of terror. A crash of thunder broke above her head, as though heaven and earth were rent asunder. She

covered her ears, with a second wild cry, and sunk down stunned. Then, dead silence.

The girl lifted her pale face and frightened eyes. The sky overhead was black as midnight—the sea was on fire with white-crested waves. The wind rose with a roar, and swept over the ocean; the lightning flamed out again. There was a second thunder-crash more terrible than the first, then a big drop of rain, then another and another.

“The boat!” she cried, with a wild shriek, “the boat!”

She flung away her gathered treasures and darted down the slope. Alas and alas! Far away, a mocking white speck, sailed the boat—she was alone with her doom on Pirate’s Rock!

She uttered no cry—she stood stock still, in her blank despair. Ah! this was despair. Very unlike that pretty, girlish sentiment of half an hour ago. She was alone on Pirate’s Rock. Long before midnight those fiery-crested waves would wash its topmost crag—long before midnight, earth and all things earthly would be gone from her forever.

She leaned against the beetling cliff, as still as the stone, in frozen horror and despair. She was so young—life was so sweet—earth was so bright and beautiful. All her life seemed to flash before her—her father, her mother, her beautiful Southern home. She was only eighteen, and she must die.

The wind arose; the waves roared and hissed, and broke over one another in mad frenzy; the darkness deepened; night seemed to fall in an instant. Flash after flash leaped out of those black clouds, lighting the awful sea; peal after peal broke the deafening thunder; the rain fell no longer in big drops, but swept in a white sheet over the waters. And, oh! worst of all, the rising tide was creeping up—creeping up; the long, white breakers wet her feet already where she stood.

She turned mechanically and ascended the cliff. She chose the highest part, and cowered down under the loftiest point of the rock. One look she took at the black sky, at the hissing hell of waters, then covered her face with both hands and waited for her doom.

She tried to pray—in vain, in vain! In that supreme moment her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth—heart and brain were numbed and mute. Her thoughts wandered wildly. She could see the alarm at Squire Rayfield’s—running hither and thither; the search for her in all sorts of probable and improbable places—the vain, fruitless search. To-morrow would come, sunlit and bright, and a girl’s dead body would float ashore, to be recognized by the horrified throng as hers. And her father, what a sight for him—what

news to carry to that pleasant Southern home! And last and dearest, Launcelot, her lover—what would he say, what would he feel, when he heard the terrible truth, when he looked upon her lying cold and stiff and stark?

She crouched there, her brain in a mad whirl, and the hours wore on. She never looked up; she could see the vivid glare of the lightning without that; she could feel the beating, the pitiless rain. Long ago she had been drenched to the skin, and she shivered in the raw night wind. Still the thunder crashed, still the waters rose; the spray from the highest billows dashed in her face where she sat. Very soon now and the agony of death would end. She was falling into a sort of stupor, in which the tumult of rain and wind, and sea and thunder blended in one long, dull, continuous roar.

“And I will die here,” she thought, in an unnatural sort of calm, “and he will never know how dearly I loved him!”

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

“A TERRIBLE night, my dear, an awful night of wind and rain, and thunder and lightning. Let us thank the good God we are not among those ‘who go down to the sea in ships,’ and let us pray for the poor souls who do.”

Mrs. Rayfield looked up from her work. She sat placidly knitting by early lamp-light, as her husband blustered in like the god of the wind.

“I thought it darkened down unusually early,” she said. “I wish Eudora would come home.”

“Eudora!” The squire faced her. “Now, mother, you never mean to say that flighty girl is off in such weather as this?”

“There was nothing wrong with the weather when she went. She has been gone ever since dinner.”

“And where, for the Lord’s sake, is she?”

“I am sure I don’t know. I never ask her where she is going. Why, she is in no danger, is she?”

“She is in danger of being drenched to the skin, and of being laid up with influenza or inflammatory rheumatism, or something equally pleasant. I’ll send after her. Very likely she’s at Mrs. Lauriston’s.”

“No,” said Mrs. Rayfield. “I think not. I saw her and Launcelot, evening before last, down the maple walk, and I fancy they had an understanding, or, rather, *mis*-understanding. They quarreled, I am certain, and he went off in a

towering passion. She is not at Mrs. Lauriston's, you will find. Better ask the servants."

The squire testily rang the bell. The servant who came knew nothing, but would inquire. Returned in five minutes with the news that Miss Varneck had gone shoreward—her favorite walk. Reuben, the stable boy, had met her.

"Gone to the beach!" exclaimed the squire. "What the deuce can keep her there, and this tornado coming on? She can't have fallen asleep on the sands, can she? I'll run down and see; and, Reuben, my lad, do you scamper off to the village and see if there are any signs of her there."

The squire blustered out. Reuben ran off on his errand. The black cloud-rack still scudded across the sky; the wind blew a gale—the tempest would burst in a few moments. As he had not run since he was a young man, the squire ran to the beach now. But his race was vain. Up the shore, down the shore, no living creature was to be seen, save himself. As he stood, gazing blankly, the first flash of lightning cleft the dark air—the first clap of thunder burst.

"Lord a' mercy!" gasped Squire Rayfield. "Where is that girl? I'll get my death looking for her."

Great rain-drops began to fall. The squire turned and scudded away to the village.

"She may be at the widow's," he thought, "to make up with Launce. Who knows? Nobody could ever make top or tail of a girl's doings."

The widow's cottage was all alight, but the shop was closed. The squire's knock was answered by Mrs. Lauriston herself, looking very pale, and with tear-stains on her cheek.

"Is Launce in?" demanded the squire, striding in, drenched through already.

Launcelot answered in person by stepping out of an inner room, where he had been kneeling, strapping a trunk. He, too, looked pale and haggard, and strangely stern; but the squire never stopped to notice now.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, squire?" the young man said. "You are wet through. Come in."

The neat cottage parlor looked strangely disordered and upset—everything flung at sixes and sevens, as though the widow and son were in the midst of an exodus.

"Is Eudora Varneck here?" asked the squire, staring around.

"Miss Varneck? Certainly not. What do you mean, Squire Rayfield?" inquired Mrs. Lauriston.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; I thought she might be.

She's out in the storm somewhere, and we don't know where, and I thought I would ask here—that is all. I have no more idea where to look for her now than the man in the moon."

There was a loud knock at the front door. Again Mrs. Lauriston opened it to admit a burly fisherman, dripping like a water-dog.

"The squire's here, ma'am, isn't he?" the man said, pulling off his cap. "I see him coming in. Jest tell him I've news of the young lady."

The squire rushed out, followed by the young doctor.

"What is it, Thompson? Out with it. Quick!"

"Bad news, squire. The young lady's got herself into a most awful fix. She's on Pirate's Rock."

There was a wild yell from the squire. Dr. Lauriston stood petrified.

"Yes, sir," said Thompson, emphatically. "My boy Joe see her take the skiff—your darter's, squire—considerable over an hour ago, and row herself away. He often see the two young ladies paddling about in that little craft, and didn't pay no particular attention, only he sez to himself, 'It's goin' to be a nasty night. I wonder if Miss Varneck knows it?' and he comes home to his supper. Well, sir, after supper, as I was smokin' my pipe and looking at the dirty state of the sky, what does I see but the little boat of Miss Julia's drifting all by itself at the mercy of the tide."

There was a second yell. The squire stood staring as if his eyes would drop out on the carpet, and still Dr. Lauriston remained petrified.

"Good heavens!" cried Mrs. Lauriston, "was Miss Varneck in the boat?"

"I told you Miss Varneck was on Pirate's Rock, ma'am," said Thompson. "My 'pinion is she moored the little skiff as well as she knew how, and it went adrift with the rising tide, and left her there. The worst of it is, there's one of the most awful storms raging that ever broke on this coast, and no boat could live through it. And if the young lady's on that rock now, she won't be there by morning."

He added the last sentence in a hushed under-tone.

The squire reeled back like a drunken man, the widow uttered a wailing cry; but Launcelot Lauriston, without word or cry, turned, took down his hat and coat, put them on, and strode past them out into the blind blackness of the raging storm.

"Stop him!" shrieked his mother. "He is mad! He will lose his life for that girl."

Thompson the fisherman laid a strong hand on the young man's shoulder.

"My lad," he said, "where are you going?"

"To save Eudora Varneck or perish with her."

He shook off the brawny hand as though it had been a feather's weight, and rushed away.

"Follow him!" cried Mrs. Lauriston, wildly. "For the love of God, Squire Rayfield, save my son! I tell you he is mad. He doesn't know what he is doing. Don't let him lose his life for that girl. What is she—cruel, heartless coquette—that my noble boy should perish for her sake?"

Her words restored the stunned squire. He rushed out, forgetful of the merciless rain and prospective rheumatism, after the impetuous young doctor. He could see him, by the weird flashes of lightning, far ahead, running as if for life and death.

"He'll be gone before I can catch up with him," thought the panting squire. "And how will I ever look his mother in the face then?"

But Squire Rayfield was in time. It was no such easy matter finding a boat and putting off in that surf in the midst of the raging tempest.

The news had spread that Miss Eudora Varneck was on Pirate's Rock, and a group of men were gathered on the sands, looking into one another's horrified faces. Launcelot Lauriston stood in their midst, white as a dead man.

"You can't do it, sir," a sturdy fisherman said. "No boat could live through it. Why, those rolling breakers here would smash to atoms any craft that ever was launched. If you put off to-night the first land you'll make will be the bottom of Massachusetts Bay."

"Give me your boat, Robinson," said the young doctor, turning his white, set face to a second fisherman. "Webster won't. If you never see her again, Miss Varneck's friends will more than repair your loss. Give me your boat."

"But, Doctor Lauriston—"

"Stop!" cried the doctor, in a fierce, high voice. "I want no words. Your boat, I say—your boat to save a human life—if you are men, and not monsters! My life is my own. I ask no one to share my peril, but go I will, if I have to swim to Pirate's Rock!"

"My boy"—the squire's hand fell on his shoulder, the squire's voice was solemn and stern—"she is beyond mortal help; and remember your mother."

"You, too, squire!" the young man said, in passionate re-

proach; "and she was your guest. Men, men! will you stand here—you who have mothers, sisters, wives, daughters—and let a helpless girl perish without one effort? Cowards, all! By Heaven! I'll have a boat if I have to take it by force!"

"That you shall, Launce Lauriston!" cried a sturdy young fellow, leaping forward. "You shall have my boat, and I'll go with you. I have neither mother, wife, sister, nor daughter, but I've a girl I love, and for her sake, I'll never stand by and see a woman perish before my very eyes. Halloo!" with a wild cheer; "this way, Lauriston, and God speed us!"

The two young men grasped hands—a fierce death-grip—and looked for a second in each other's flashing eyes by the lightning's gleam. Then they had bounded off, and the group left behind looked at one another with awe-struck faces.

"They have gone to their death!" said a solemn voice. "The Lord have mercy on their souls!"

"Amen!" groaned Squire Rayfield. "And may the good Lord keep me from ever meeting that mad boy's widowed mother!"

"They have launched the boat!" cried a third voice. "Look, men—look! There they go, rolling through the breakers. I didn't think they could ha' done it. They'll make Pirate's Rock now, but they'll be ground to powder there."

By the almost continuous flashing of the lightning they could see the fisherman's boat reeling through the mad waves for a moment or two. The double darkness of night and storm swallowed it up.

"It's an awful task they've undertaken," said an old man; "but it's to save a human life, and the good God will help them. Two better men couldn't be found to manage a boat than young Lauriston and Joe Weldon."

The boat reeled on. Through the blackness of night and storm, only lighted by the lurid glare of the lightning, with the terrible thunder breaking over their heads, with the frenzied waves hissing and howling above and below them, with the pitiless rain drenching them to the bone, the two young heroes bent to their task.

Oh, surely the God who holds the sea in the hollow of His hand upheld that frail bark!

She reeled on—tossing, sinking, filling; she held bravely on her way. They could see the topmost crag of Pirate's Rock by the fitful lightning's gleam.

"I know where we can land," shouted Joe Weldon, at the top of his voice. "Due south, Lauriston—due south."

It was the sheltered nook—if sheltered it could be called now—where Eudora had run her dory ashore.

Through the fierce breakers they drove their boat aground, and Launcelot leaped out.

“Wait here, Weldon,” he called. “If she is on the rock I’ll find her in five seconds.”

The boiling waves beat almost to the top, but the tide was not yet at its highest, and a few feet still remained bare.

It was hardly a quarter of an hour before, when, with her last thought of him, Eudora Varneck had crouched down to die.

A little soaked heap, she crouched there still, oblivious, in her stupor of despair, of all the horrors around her. The worst pain of death, the keenest agony, was over. A merciful stupor held her now.

A wild, delirious shout of exultation resounded above the frantic howling of the storm. With that mad cry of delight, Launcelot Lauriston caught the poor little frail figure in his strong arms as though it had been a feather’s weight.

“My darling! my angel! my love! my life! Oh, thank God—thank God!”

Then, holding her there, strained to his heart, he broke out into a fierce paroxysm of weeping—man’s weeping—wild and bitter; such tears as in all his life before he had never shed.

She opened her eyes. There was life enough left to know the voice—to feel in whose passionate clasp she was held.

“Launcelot!” she whispered, feebly. “I thought you would come.”

Then the blue eyes closed again, and she lay still and motionless against his breast.

He carried her to the boat; he laid her carefully at his feet in the bottom, and once again seized the oars.

“Now back!” he cried. “The Providence that has brought us safely thus far will bring us safely home.”

Once more they bent to their task. The shoreward journey was less perilous than the outward, for wind and tide were in their favor. But the risk was fearful. The boat danced like a cockle-shell on top of the boiling waves, in danger every instant of being swamped.

They knew their peril fully, those two brave fellows, but they never flinched, as, with every nerve braced and strained, they rowed ashore. And still the little figure in the bottom lay still as stone.

They reached the shore—they landed. A wild “hurrah!” that rang over all the raging of wind and sea, greeted them as

they sprung out. Torches flashed through the darkness now, their red glare lighting up the terrible scene.

Women were there as well as men—women weeping, or praying, or cowering with mental terror. Only two stood foremost who neither wept nor trembled in that supreme hour—the mother of Launcelot Lauriston and Joe Weldon's plighted wife.

The young doctor lifted his lifeless burden from the bottom of the boat, staggered forward, and laid her in Squire Rayfield's arms.

"God bless you, my brave Launce!" the old man said, sobbing aloud. "God forever bless you for this night's work!"

"My boy—my boy!" his mother said, coming forward with outstretched arms. "My own heroic son!"

"Mother!" he exclaimed, "you here?"

He made a step forward, reeled blindly, and fell fainting in the arms of Thompson the fisherman.

CHAPTER V.

OLD FRIENDS MEET.

WITH the brilliant summer sunshine flooding her room, with canary birds singing among roses and geraniums in the windows, Eudora Varneck opened her eyes upon this mortal life once more.

They were all clustered around her bed—the squire and his wife, and old Dr. Harper of the village.

She looked from one to the other, vaguely recognizing them, yet evidently puzzled.

"Have I been sick?" she asked. "Why am I in bed?"

How weak her voice sounded! how tenderly, how pityingly, they all looked upon her!

"You have not been very well, my dear Miss Varneck," Dr. Harper replied, briskly; "but, with the help of Providence, you'll be better than ever directly. Now, don't talk, like a good little girl. Take this nice drink and go off asleep."

She passed her hand over her forehead. The bewildered look began to give place to one of wild affright.

"The boat!" she cried, shrilly—"the boat went adrift! And the storm, the rain, and the lightning—and I was alone on Pirate's Rock! Did I dream it, or what does it mean?"

"Dreamed it, of course, my dear," said the brisk doctor; "and a nasty dream it must have been. But you're all right

now. I wouldn't think about it, if I were you. Here's something good. Take it and fall asleep."

The doctor's "something good" proved to be a particularly nauseous draught, but she swallowed it obediently, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

"She'll do nicely now," said the doctor, with a satisfied nod. "Keep the room dark and quiet, and she'll sleep all day. Next time she awakes, she'll be apt to recollect all. You may answer her questions. It won't do to keep her in a fever of suspense."

Hours passed. The sunlit day had given place to starlit night when Eudora again awoke. A shaded lamp burned upon the table, and a long-unseen but dear and familiar face was the first object that met her eyes.

"Papa!" she said, with a joyful cry.

Colonel Varneck, but little changed by his eight years' travel, bent down and kissed the pretty face.

"My dear little girl—my darling daughter! Papa has come for you at last."

The effect of the opiate had not yet worn away. She nestled her hand in his, took a few tea-spoonfuls of essence of beef, and, with a loving, contented smile, dropped asleep once more.

Once again the sun shone, and the canaries chirped amid the roses and geraniums when she awoke—this time with a cool head and a clear brain. Her father still sat by her bedside, and Mr. and Mrs. Rayfield were there, too.

"Better, my precious girl?" her father asked, bending above her.

"Better?" she repeated, with a puzzled face. "I haven't been sick, have I? I feel quite well. Ah, I remember!" Her eyes went from face to face, with a frightened look on her own. "Pirate's Rock—the boat—the storm—that awful, awful night!"

She shuddered from head to foot and covered her eyes with her hands. Suddenly she dropped them and half sat up.

"Who saved me?" she cried. "Some one came through all the tempest, at the last moment, and carried me away. Was it an angel, or was it—"

She stopped.

The squire looked piteously at his wife. Mrs. Rayfield came cheerily forward.

"No angel, my dear, but two very courageous young men—Joe Weldon the fisherman and—Doctor Lauriston."

The girl's pale face turned luminous. A rosy light dawned softly through her pallor over neck, and cheek, and brow.

"Doctor Lauriston," she repeated, softly, as if the name were sweet music. "Then it was no dream?"

The rosy light deepened and deepened. She turned away from them all, trembling and thrilling from head to foot. It all came back—his kisses, his caresses, the name he had called her. She could feel the straining clasp of his heart against her own.

"My love! my love!" she thought. "My darling! my hero! I refused him—I scorned him—and this is his revenge!"

"Eudora," her father said, gently breaking the silence, "my own dear girl, why do you shrink and tremble now? You are safe with us all, through Heaven's great mercy."

She turned to him suddenly and held out both arms.

"Oh, papa!" she said, with an eloquent cry, "he saved my life twice, at the risk of his own—once from a maddened mob and devouring flames, and again from drowning on Pirate's Rock. Oh, papa, papa! go and tell him how grateful I am now—how sorry I feel for the past—how dearly I love him!"

The words broke from her in spite of herself; her father looked at the squire and his wife with a puzzled face.

"Tell whom?" he asked. "Whom does she mean?"

"Young Doctor Lauriston, I think," replied Mrs. Rayfield, fidgeting. "My dear, you are excited. Pray don't say anything more now. This young man, colonel—he is a young professional gentleman of our village—has twice been fortunate enough to save Miss Varneck's life, it appears: once during the riot week in New York, and again, two nights ago, from perishing on Pirate's Rock."

"What did you say his name was?" asked the colonel, with a blank stare.

"Lauriston—Doctor Launcelot Lauriston."

"Launcelot Lauriston? Do I hear aright?"

It was their turn to stare now at the utter amazement, the complete consternation, in the questioner's face.

"Certainly!" replied Mrs. Rayfield, in surprise. "You don't know him, do you, colonel? Unless you met him in his boyhood, it is impossible, for during the last eight years he and his widowed mother have been residents of our village."

"No," said Colonel Varneck; but the dazed look still remained. "No, I never met your Doctor Lauriston. By the bye, how old is he?"

"Twenty, or thereabouts."

"No," reiterated the colonel, slowly recovering himself, "I never met Doctor Launcelot Lauriston; but I once—I once knew another person of that name. It was the coincidence struck me. It is a name one doesn't meet every day. And so this young hero saved your life twice, my dear?" bending above his daughter; "and you want me to go and thank him?"

"If you please, papa. He is so good, so noble, and I—Oh, you don't know what a bad, bad, bad girl I have been!"

Her voice choked, and she suddenly turned away her head.

"I think I understand," Colonel Varneck said, graveily. "My dear little girl must not worry herself over this matter. I will see if I can not make it all right. Where does our modern *Cœur de Lion* live, Rayfield? I should like to see him at once, on more accounts than one."

Again the squire and his wife exchanged looks. The squire's face was the picture of helpless perplexity; his wife's said, plainly, "Let him go. He may be in time yet."

"I'll go with you, colonel," the squire said, starting up. "I'm an old friend of the family. Let us start at once."

The two men left the house and walked briskly down the village street. Both were unusually silent and grave.

The sound of that long-unheard name had strangely startled Colonel Varneck, and Squire Rayfield had his own reasons for fearing Miss Varneck's impulsive repentance came too late.

And the squire was right. Long before the pretty white cottage among the rose-vines was reached, he could see that the shutters were up and the shop closed.

"It is as I suspected," he said, gravely. "They are gone."

"Gone?" echoed Colonel Varneck. "Who?"

"Mrs. Lauriston and her son. See—the house is closed, the shop shut, the blinds all made fast. They have gone."

"And where, pray, have they gone to?"

"That is more than I know. The last time I saw Mrs. Lauriston, I inferred from what she said that her son had resolved upon quitting Silver Shore for good, and she had resolved on accompanying him. They were very proud people; and the fact is, Colonel Varneck," blurted out the undiplomatic squire, "this young fellow, Lauriston, loved your daughter very dearly, and took her refusal terribly to heart."

Colonel Varneck regarded the speaker in complete astonishment.

"Loved my daughter! took her refusal to heart! Do you mean to say, Rayfield, matters have gone so far as that?"

"It was no fault of ours, colonel," said the squire, penitently. "I always knew it wouldn't do—I always said so. A finer fellow, physically, mentally and morally than Launce Lauriston the sun doesn't shine on; but then, you see, he's poor—the most heinous of earthly crimes—and she's an heiress. But for all that," added the squire, somewhat inconsequently, "she likes him better than she dreams of, although she refused him in the maple walk."

Colonel Varneck made no reply. His own youth came vividly back to him—his own early dream, when he also had been Launcelot Lauriston and gave the world for love. Whether it were well lost, he alone knew.

The wife of his youth was his still, loving him with a passionate, jealous, exacting love; and yet a sense of something wanting, something altered, something too vague to name, left his heart full of dreary pain and emptiness.

He loved his wife as he had loved her in those blissful months, or strove hard to do so; but the sense of loss was there always—the only painful thing in his existence. He knew what his wife's and mother's ambitious dreams were for the future of their daughter, but in their match-making schemes he had no part.

"I am sorry this young man is gone," he said, breaking the silence. "I owe him a heavy debt. I should have liked to thank him, at least."

"Look there!" exclaimed the squire, abruptly. "There is some one closing the garden gate—an odd-looking customer, too, and a stranger here. What can he want at the widow's cottage? By George! it's the noseless chap that first brought Mrs. Lauriston here. It's all right, colonel! If any one can tell us of our lost birds' whereabouts, here's the man!"

They were within a yard or two of the gate. At the sound of the squire's loud voice, the stranger—a tall man wearing a cloak—turned round and faced them.

Colonel Varneck came to a dead halt, with an exclamation of amazement, and the sallow face of the stranger turned, for an instant, absolutely livid.

The two men stood blankly staring at each other in speechless surprise.

"Thousand thunders!" cried the tall stranger in the cloak; "can I believe my eyes? Is it really you, *mon colonel*?"

"Captain Dandin!" exclaimed the colonel; "this is an astonisher! Where, in the name of all that's astounding, do you drop from?"

Captain Dandin, as little altered by time as the handsome

colonel himself, caught that gentleman's hand and wrung it with effusion.

"The last place on the habitable globe I should look to meet you, *mon colonel*! And you can return the compliment, my faith! *Sacre bleu*! how oddly these things come about! I think you are safe in delightful Glen Gower, and you think I am knocking around in some big, bustling city of the Old World, and lo! we both stumble over each other in this lost corner of Massachusetts. How melodramatic, to be sure! And how is our stately Madame Varneck, and our beautiful Mrs. Varneck, and the charming little Dora? Well and happy, I earnestly trust!"

"Tolerably well, and, I have every reason to believe, tolerably happy also. But what the deuce, Dandin," the colonel exclaimed, his ungovernable astonishment getting the better of him, "brings you, of all people, to Silver Shore?"

"And why not I, *mon colonel*?" answered the noseless captain, in his old, airy manner. "Does my colonel think poor Dandin can have no friends in this big world? I come to see my charming protégées—the interesting widow and her clever son."

"Your protégées!" with a puzzled look. "I didn't know you had turned philanthropist, Dandin."

"No," the captain said, in his sprightly way; "the world never gave Dandin more than his due. Never mind that—let us talk about your interesting family."

"But I must mind this, even before my interesting family, since I want to find out the whereabouts of Mrs. Lauriston and her son."

"You do? And why?"

"Because the young man has just saved my daughter's life."

"The pretty little Dora! And he saved her life? How was it, my colonel?"

Colonel Varneck related in brief the little episode of Pirate's Rock.

"*Mon Dieu*! how thrilling! And my clever boy is a hero, after all! Ah! I always thought it was in him. And the pretty little Dora is still here, then? I shall be happy to see her. How long has she been here, my colonel?"

"Nearly a month. How came these people to be protégées of yours, Dandin?"

"By the merest chance in the world. After I left Glen Gower I fell in with them; they were poor—oh, how poor they were!—they were interesting—they were charming; I gave

them money—I took them here—I set them up in the pretty little fancy store. There, you have it, my colonel.”

“And you have never seen them since?”

“Never since! The big ocean rolled between us; I come back, after eight long years; I run down to see my interesting pensioners, and, behold! I find the nest empty—the birds flown!”

“Flown whither? They have surely left word, Dandin?”

“Left no word, my colonel. How were they to know Dandin was coming? And you really wanted to see them? What a pity you chanced to be too late!”

His black eyes flashed with a sinister gleam. Squire Rayfield, hovering aloof, eyed him distrustfully.

“He has a hang-dog look, that foreign fellow without the nose. He looks like anything but a benefactor of his species, and yet Mrs. Lauriston was never done singing his praises!”

“Let me make you acquainted with my friend Squire Rayfield, Captain Dandin,” said the colonel, leading him up; “a very old friend, at whose house Eudora has been stopping.”

The squire bowed stiffly in return for the airy captain’s flourishing salute and rapidly rolled off sentences.

“I have heard of Captain Dandin before,” said the squire, “from our mutual friend Mr. Lauriston. My wife and I will feel ourselves honored by your company at dinner, sir.”

Again the captain bowed—his white teeth and bright smile at their most brilliant, and his voluble sentences deluging the plain squire.

“So happy, my dear sir—so delighted at the prospect of once more beholding my pretty little friend Miss Dora. A charming young lady now, no doubt. How my poor little Fairy will be charmed and honored to make her acquaintance, with your kind permission, *mon colonel!*”

“Fairy!” exclaimed Colonel Varneck. “You don’t mean to say, Dandin, your daughter is here, too?”

“In New York, my colonel—waiting dutifully for papa’s return. You will find her changed since you saw her in Spain. Shot up like—how do you call him?—Jack of the Beanstalk, and remarkably handsome; so they tell me; I don’t profess to be a judge; but not one half so handsome, I am certain, as the pretty little Dora.”

“Confound his eternal clack!” thought the squire. “How he does run on!”

The captain continued to “run on” until they reached the house. Colonel Varneck went at once to his daughter’s room to report his lack of success.

He found her sitting up, looking pale and pretty in a white muslin wrapper, all her bright hair freshly curled, and a brilliant, expectant flush on her cheek. It went to the soldier's heart to disappoint that eager, girlish hope.

"We were a little too late this time, my dear," he said, kissing the pale forehead tenderly. "We found them gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, my dear—left the village, it appears, mother and son. The house is shut up. There, there! don't put on that grieved face; we'll find your friends yet, if they're above ground, and thank your preserver with all our hearts."

She made no reply. She suddenly turned away her face from him.

"I met another old friend, though—you remember him, I dare say, Dora—Captain Dandin."

"Yes," she said, in a stifled voice.

"He returned to the house with us. He is going to stay for dinner. He would very much like to see 'little Dora' again."

"Not now, papa," she said, with a sort of wail—"not to-day. My head aches, and I feel—Oh, papa!" with a stifled sob, "please leave me alone for a little while!"

He stooped and kissed her, with a face of tender pity, and rose at once and left the room.

"My poor little girl!" he said—"my little, tender-hearted Dora! the bitter lesson of life—lost love—has come to you as well as the rest of us. I am sorry for you—I am sorry for this brave young hero; but, as the squire says, 'it won't do, my dear—it won't do!'"

And Eudora, left alone, ran and locked her door, and then flung herself, as women do, whether the pain be in the head or heart, face downward among the pillows, and wept the bitterest tears she had ever shed in the eighteen years of her bright young life.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER.

SHE sat by the window alone, looking steadfastly out at the ceaseless stream of human life pouring up and down Broadway. The August afternoon was gray and overcast, threatening speedy rain; but Broadway was crowded, and silks, and lace, and pretty faces swept down to meet mustaches and tall hats coming up.

Stages rattled noisily by; stately carriages, with liveried

coachmen, rolled after; organ-grinders ground out their stale tunes, and beggars stood at corners whining their pitiful cries.

She sat and watched it all—the ever-shifting panorama, years old yet ever new, doubly new to her, since she saw it for the first time.

A tall and handsome girl, with a dark face lighted up into the splendor of vivid beauty by a pair of wonderful black eyes. Masses of blue-black hair were coiled and twisted and braided, as though there were no end to its abundance, around a shapely head, held haughtily aloft on a slender throat. A beauty born, by right divine of that wondrous fall of hair and the luminous glory of those flashing eyes, yet with a strangely worn and weary look marring its youthful brightness. Hollow circles surrounded those Spanish eyes, and haggard lines marred the perfect beauty of that exquisite mouth.

She was quite alone. She had sat there alone the livelong day. Doors opened and shut—for her room was in a busy hotel—gay voices and laughter echoed along the carpeted corridors, but no one came near her.

Alone she sat—a “stranger in a strange land”—more solitary in the heart of the great city than she might have been in the depths of a primeval forest. A sighing wind began to wail fitfully as the afternoon wore on, sending the dust in blinding clouds before it. The girl’s dark, haggard eyes went to the overcast sky.

“Cold and gray,” she said, “like my life!”

She rose with a sort of shiver, and began to pace slowly up and down. She was unusually tall, with the grace and bearing of a queen, and her plain black silk dress trailed in heavy folds to the carpet with statuesque grace.

“Oh!” she thought, with a weary sigh, “what happy women there are in the world! Young girls, shielded by tender love from all the misery, and cruelty, and crime of this big, bad earth—girls who love and are beloved, pure and innocent to the last! Happy wives—thrice blessed mothers! I have seen them go by to-day, and I never knew before what a lost and hardened wretch I was! Only nineteen!”—she stopped, leaning heavily against the casement—“only nineteen, and tired of life already!”

A carriage drew up before the door.

She looked at it listlessly. The door opened and two men sprung out, and at sight of the foremost the girl started suddenly erect, galvanized into new life.

“At last!” she said, between set, white teeth. “My brief holiday is at an end. He is here once more, and the old game

of cheating and lying, and craft and cunning, must begin. Are those people his first victims in this land, and what is my rôle in the new play, I wonder?"

She resumed her seat by the window, and the darkly handsome face settled into a look of still disdain that seemed habitual to it, as if she scorned herself too much to seek to hide it.

An instant later, and the door was thrown open by an impetuous hand, and Captain Dandin the sprightly came in.

"She is here!" cried the captain. "My Fairy, my only one! grown out of all knowledge. Waiting for papa, my precious, and lonely in this big, noisy, dirty city—as lonely as can be? Look, my colonel! Look, dear Miss Dora! Behold the male Cornelia and his jewel—behind Dandin and his daughter!"

The young lady rose and submitted with still scorn to her father's rapturous French embrace. Then the great dark eyes turned in calm scrutiny upon Colonel Varneck and Eudora.

"Fairy has forgotten an old friend, I am afraid," the colonel said, coming forward, with that genial smile which lighted up his sunburned face so beautifully; "yet Fairy and the 'big American gentleman' were great friends once, in old Valencia."

She made a step forward, her black eyes kindling, her whole face lighting up. A red glow and a brilliant smile illumined her dark loveliness with magical beauty.

"In Valencia?" she repeated. "The sick gentleman I helped to nurse? Oh, I remember! It is Colonel Varneck."

"Colonel Varneck, and unutterably glad to meet his kind little Spanish nurse once more. But little no longer—grown, as your father says, out of all knowledge, and with the promise of her childhood more than fulfilled. Come here, Eudora, and help me welcome Miss Dandin to America. You are to be bosom friends, young ladies, so the sooner you begin, the better."

Captain Dandin's daughter hesitated an instant, and a dark-red glow rose up to her very brow. But impulsive Eudora's arms were around her—warm-hearted Eudora's lips were pressed to hers.

"I am sure we will be the best of friends," she whispered, "even if papa had never said it. I like you already."

Miss Dandin submitted to the embrace as she had submitted to her father's, but she did not return it. Some inward feeling left two scarlet spots, quite foreign to her usual complexion, burning on either cheek, and she looked for an instant at the captain, with a light that was absolutely savage in her

black eyes. But that florid gentleman was gushing in his usual vivacious fashion.

"Ah, my Heaven! how charming, how sweet! such a perfect picture of youth and loveliness, and innocence and beauty! My dark Fairy and the sunny little blonde, Miss Eudora! We live our youth over again in our children, do we not, my colonel? And what an exquisite sentiment that is!"

Colonel Varneck made no reply to this enthusiastic gush. He was looking with deep interest at the dark, statuesque face of the captain's daughter—very statuesque just now. It looked as though it were cut out of gray stone, as she sat staring straight before her.

"And how do you like New York, Fairy?" he asked. "I may call you Fairy, may I not?"

"You may call me anything you please. It sounds as though I were a King Charles spaniel, with a silver collar and a wrinkled nose; but as I never happened to possess a name of my own, I suppose it will do as well as a better."

Captain Dandin laughed in his airy, light-hearted way.

"Fairy is cross," he said; "and when Fairy is cross, *ma foi!* the sun ceases to shine, and the scheme of the universe comes to an end! Fairy feels too big and too stately for so childish an appellation; so, *mon colonel*, when Fairy is out of temper call her Valencia. She likes that better; don't you, my own?"

"His own" answered him by a second flash of her black eyes, then turned back moodily to her window.

"You are rude, my Fairy," her father murmured, reproachfully. "You do not answer the colonel's question. Do you like New York?"

"As I like all the rest—Paris, Naples, Vienna, Madrid, Lisbon, Baden. Where is the difference? They are all the same."

"Fairy is *blasé!*" the captain exclaimed, with his tinkling laugh. "Such a traveler, my dear Dora! Over the world with papa during the past six years—here, there, everywhere; knows each capital of Europe as you know your New York. The foolish captain is idiotically fond of his tall daughter. Life without her would be—how do you name it, your great desert?—Sahara? So we have gone together always; so we will go until some impetuous young lover—like Prince Charming in the story—comes on his fiery charger and bears her away. And then, what is left to the poor old captain? Why, his gray hairs, and his gruel, and his grave."

For the third time his daughter looked at him—such a dark

gaze of concentrated scorn that even the colonel could hardly fail to see it. It passed like a flash. Once more she was back, watching the ceaseless tide of life ebbing and flowing on the street; but it left the colonel strangely startled and uneasy.

"Then, since New York possesses no novelty, no interest for you," he said, "you will not regret leaving it. You will not be sorry to exchange it for Glen Gower and our humdrum country life. My daughter and I start for home to-morrow, and your father has kindly consented to accompany us with you—for a very long visit."

She bowed low.

"My father's will is mine," she said, in a subdued tone. "It is as he decides."

"And as Fairy prefers, though she does not say it. Ah, Miss Varneck, I foresee that my daughter and you will go on velvet! To-day Fairy is sulky; to-morrow Fairy will be the sunshine itself. What! going so soon? Surely not?"

"I have business to attend to, and my daughter has hosts of friends to call on," the colonel said, rising. "We really must. Until to-morrow, then, Miss Dandin, adieu!"

She rose up and bowed them out, with a certain queenliness of aspect peculiar to her. With Eudora she shook hands, and the heiress of Glen Gower was altogether too much impressed by this stately Spanish girl to attempt to kiss her for the second time.

"How beautiful she is, papa!" she cried, when the carriage door had closed upon them. "But, oh! so proud, so disdainful, so haughty! I shall always be afraid of her, I know."

Left to themselves, the captain and his daughter faced each other with the air of two accomplished swordsmen on guard.

There were occasions, evidently, when the captain did not gush, and this was one of them. His black eyes gleamed with an angry fire; hers looked back at him steadily, with merciless contempt.

"How dare you?" he said. "Are you going mad, Valencia Dandin?"

"Why did you bring that girl here?" she asked in her turn, in a cold, measured voice. "To make me feel what I am all the more keenly? She is as innocent as a babe, and I—what am I, Captain Dandin?"

"Answer your own question," he said, sullenly. "What are you? As good as that fair-haired upstart, with her baby face and mawkish smile—better than she is, although Captain Dandin's daughter."

"I will tell you what I am," the girl said, bitterly—"a cheat, a trickster, a false, deceitful, hypocritical wretch! What have I been for the past six years, dragged about from one gambling-hell to another, but the gilded bait with which you fished for your prey? I was to smile, and dress, and look pretty, and turn the heads of the poor fools with more money than brains, while you emptied their pockets at the gaming-table. The Kursaals of Baden and Homburg, and such places, have been the stage where I have played my miserable, lying part, at your bidding, listening to and being a companion for men that Colonel Varneck would think his spotless daughter degraded by once looking at. I flattered them, and smiled upon them, and sung for them, and let them make love to me, while you fleeced them, and cheated them to their idiotic faces, with loaded dice and marked cards. This has been my life—this is what I am! And you bring this girl here, and ask me to be her companion—her friend! Father, have you no heart, no conscience? Look at me! Old before my time, with the knowledge of a wicked old age at nineteen! What girlhood have I ever had? What home? Dragged about the world—through the worst cities of Europe—my home, hotels and lodging-houses—my associates, gamblers and adventurers—my own father the worst among them! Is there one of these cities I have named where the police do not know 'Dandin and his daughter' as they know the vilest criminals? Father!" with a fierce, passionate cry, "there is a God, and He will punish you for what you have done!"

Captain Dandin stood before her, listening to this impassioned harangue with an icy stare and smile. He clapped his hands softly at the close, and broke into a low, derisive laugh.

"Bravo! encore! I did not think it was in you, my dear! It must be the air of free America, I think, for I never heard you run on so glibly before. This is the land of woman's rights, and free speech, and strong-mindedness, and female orators, and other pleasant things of that sort. And is it catching, I wonder? Have you quite finished, my Fairy? Because I am going out."

She sat down, sullenly turning her back upon him.

"You are iron," she said—"you are harder than iron! You have neither heart nor soul—you fear neither God nor Satan! I might have known it. I had better have held my tongue."

"Much better, my Fairy, since it is simply a waste of words and breath. What a foolish Fairy it is, and half the girls going would give their ears for the gay life you have led!

Why, you have been danced over the world—you have been well dressed, well fed, well educated. What more would you have? And now I bring you to America, where I will send you to shine in the highest circles—where I mean to find you a handsome young husband—and see how you thank me for all! Ungrateful Fairy! But your father forgives you! You have been reading your prayer-book, poor child, or your catechism, and you believe the pretty little fables they tell you, and this is the result. To-morrow you will be yourself, and—Meantime, are there any letters?”

She pointed in moody silence to a writing-case on the table. The captain opened it, humming a gay air, and took out half a dozen.

The evening had darkened down—the wind rose, and the rain began to fall. The girl looked out at the darkening prospect with dreary, despairing eyes.

“Oh, my beautiful Spain!” she said, with a weary sigh. “Why did I ever leave you for this cold land?”

She heard her father utter a sharp exclamation, but she did not turn to look. She sat as if changing to stone, her heart heavier than any stone in her bosom.

“I am going out, Fairy,” her father said, hurriedly. “I may not be back until late. Go to bed, like a good little Fairy, and sleep off your vapors, and be Captain Dandin’s clever daughter again to-morrow.”

She never answered him; she never turned round. She sat stiller than marble, her face rigid and colorless in the deepening dusk. The door closed behind him; she was alone once more; but she did not stir.

The moments passed, the hours went by, but the captain’s daughter still kept her lonely vigil—moveless as though she had looked at Medusa, and were turning to stone.

Meantime, Captain Dandin hurried up Broadway through the rain. He stopped at the corner and hailed a passing omnibus, leaped in, and was whirled away.

His destination was a boarding-house—far west—a quiet, respectable place. As he rang the door-bell, the August night had quite shut down, and the rain fell heavily.

“I only hope I may find them in,” muttered the captain. “It reminds me, my faith! of that other night, eight years ago, when I first visited my nice little boy and his pretty mamma.”

The door was opened by a servant-girl, and the captain stepped out of the rain into the hall, redolent of the odor of perpetual dinners of boiled cabbage.

"Doctor and Mrs. Lauriston stop here?" the captain asked. "Are they at home?"

"I don't know."

"Be good enough to ascertain then, my dear. If either of them is within, give him or her this."

"This" was the captain's card.

The girl departed, and returned presently.

"The doctor's out, sir, but Mrs. Lauriston's up in the parlor. You're to walk right up."

A jerk of her thumb indicated the locality of the apartment. Captain Dandin ran nimbly up the stairs, and into the gaslit boarding-house parlor.

A lady sitting alone rose from her rocking-chair and advanced eagerly to meet him.

"My dear Captain Dandin! how kind of you this is! But it is only a part of all your great goodness. You received my boy's letter?"

Captain Dandin lifted the hand she extended gallantly to his lips.

"Not half an hour ago, dear madame, and flew hither at once. And we meet again, after eight long years! *Mon Dieu!* the thought is transport! And looking so well—younger, handsomer than ever! Dear lady, Dandin is at a loss to express his rapture to-night!"

Mrs. Lauriston smiled quietly at her visitor's flighty, foreign way. She would hardly have tolerated this style of address from any one else, but the captain was an exceptionable character, and then she owed him so much.

"Captain Dandin is not usually at a loss for words to express his feelings, rapturous or otherwise. How sorry I am Launcelot is not at home, nor likely to be until very late! and I know he is most anxious to see you. He noticed your name among the arrivals, and wrote to the customary address at once."

"And by so doing relieved me of an immense load of anxiety and suspense. Dear lady, how unutterably anxious I have been! What's your Yankee word for it—worried—fidget? I arrive at New York; I fly to Silver Shore; I find the pretty little cottage all dark, deserted, forsaken—my interesting friends gone! *Mon Dieu!* I say to myself, what is it? What does it mean? Why does it happen? Where have they gone, and without telling Dandin? I come back to New York, desolated, inconsolable. I find my nice boy's letter awaiting me. I hail a fiacre; I rush here, pell-mell. Dear lady, tell me—what does it all mean?"

"It means, Captain Dandin, that we have left Silver Shore forever!" the widow replied, gravely. "I have been very happy there—very happy! Happier, perhaps, than I will ever be elsewhere. But my boy wished it, and his will is my law. He is very unhappy, my poor Launce! The scene of his misery had become hateful to him. He was determined to go, and I was equally determined he should not go alone. He is all that I have in the wide world, my kind friend. Even you can not blame me."

"I? Madame, I am charmed! It is beautiful, it is divine—this maternal love! But who is she?"

"She?"

Mrs. Lauriston stared.

"Ah, dear lady, Dandin is an old man! He has a tall daughter of nineteen, but he has not forgotten his youth. Once I was young—once I was handsome—once I was in love. Who is she?"

"Her name is Eudora Varneck. You are quite right, captain. My poor boy has fallen madly, infatuatedly in love. Oh! why did that girl ever come to Silver Shore? We were so entirely happy together—I and my precious son!"

"And will be again, dear madame. Dandin vows it! We won't let pretty little bread-and-butter school-girls stand between us and the sun. We blow them out of our way—pouf! like that. She is Miss Varneck, of Glen Gower—a little baby-faced heiress, not worthy to unclasp the latchet of our boy's shoes. *Ma foi!* I know her well."

"You know her?"

"Well! Better than well—from her childhood, from her babyhood. Good enough—but here," tapping his forehead—"bah! I met her father at Silver Shore—the big colonel. He was at your house, looking for you and the *bourgeois* doctor who had saved his imbecile heiress. He didn't find you—serve him right!—and he takes his little heiress away. Bah! again and yet again. I mock myself of them. They are imbecile—both!"

The intense scorn of the captain's sallow face was something indescribable. Mrs. Lauriston looked at him in surprise. 'This phase of his flighty character was something altogether new to her.

"They are here, in New York, to-night. To-morrow they go home. They have invited the captain and his daughter to go—to eat their bread and salt, to become their guests—and we go. My daughter would like it. Did I tell you, dear lady, my daughter was here?"

“No; and yet we saw her arrival duly chronicled with yours. Miss Dandin is quite well, I trust?”

“Entirely. My Fairy is always well. You shall know her, dear lady. You will love her—she will love you. I had hoped— But that is past.”

“What?”

“Ah! why speak of it? And yet, why not? My Fairy is handsome, is young, is amiable—will be rich. I say to myself: ‘My nice boy at Silver Shore is a tall young man now—handsome, too; amiable, likewise; clever, and a doctor. One day he will be rich. I will fetch my Fairy; I shall present him. And then, *ma foi!* why not—why not a wedding?’”

The captain flourished his ten fingers with a finishing wave that made Mrs. Lauriston laugh; but she shook her head.

“You are very, very good; but it may never be. It is too late. My boy’s heart is gone.”

“Bah! And at twenty? Dear lady, my heart was broken six, seven—a dozen times, at that age. It will come back. Hearts, like footballs, are caught in the rebound. Ah! how it would be charming—my daughter and your son married! But we leave New York to-morrow.”

“And Launce and I leave within the week. He has been fortunate enough to find a promising opening. Doctor Brithwood, of Baltimore, wants an assistant, and has offered the place to my son. He has accepted, and I go to keep house for both.”

“The very thing!” cried the captain. “Baltimore is within easy riding distance of Glen Gower. How it falls out! Does your son know he goes so near to his false divinity?”

“I think not. That would not influence him, however, since he is not likely to meet her. Ah, Captain Dandin, she is a cruel coquette! She lured my boy on as only a confirmed flirt would lure him, until he loved her madly, and then she jilted him in cold blood. It was wicked! it was shameful! I almost hate her when I think of it! I warned Launce. But when will impetuous youth be warned?”

“Never!” said the captain. “It is a waste of breath, and this fleeting madness is something they must go through as they go through teething. Once settled in Baltimore, we will cure him. My Fairy shall do it. Not a word to him, mind, and I shall not say a word to her. Let Fate work. And now, dear lady, it grows late. I am forced to tear myself away. I will find you as soon as you arrive at Baltimore. Best love to Launcelot. Dear lady, good-night.”

He kissed Mrs. Lauriston's slender hand again and bowed himself out. As he had come, so he was gone—like a flash.

The rain was falling heavily when the captain reached the street, but he hurried along through it all, his face lighted with triumphant exultation.

"The hour of Dandin's victory and Dandin's greatness is at hand!" he muttered. "The hour of beautiful Mrs. Varneck and the pretty Eudora's downfall is very near. Dandin's daughter shall reign mistress of Glen Gower and the Varneck thousands before the world is six months older. And they? Bah! I'll grind them like snakes in the dust under my heel!"

CHAPTER VII.

EXTREMELY MYSTERIOUS.

IN the golden sunlight of a hot August afternoon, the party from New York reached Glen Gower—the colonel and his daughter, the captain and his.

The carriage met them at Baltimore, and they whirled along, through a cloud of dust, rapidly to the mansion.

The ponderous entrance gates stood wide, and they rolled along the spacious drive, under the mighty trees, casting long shadows on the cool greensward.

Very fair and stately the old Maryland manor looked in the luminous light of the summer sun, with its spacious verandas, where the climbing roses ran, its blooming parterres, its velvety sweeps of sward, its cool, shining fish-ponds, its statues, gleaming white through the greenish gloom of the shrubberies, and far away the ceaseless, shining sea.

Eudora Varneck's bright eyes lighted up with a glad light that had not filled them since she had lost her lover.

"Is it not beautiful?" she cried. "Look, Valencia! My own dear, darling home!"

For the Spanish beauty and the little Maryland heiress had grown to be very good friends during their southward journey.

Miss Dandin was not at all times cased in that repulsive armor of cold steel which had held them off at first; she could be indescribably sweet and gracious when she chose. And when she did choose, words are weak to tell the fascination of those eyes of liquid splendor, that musical, foreign-toned voice, those rare, bright smiles.

She had that fatal siren gift—the gift to bewitch, to fascinate, at will. No mortal woman of the "earth, earthy," much less man, could have withstood the enchantment of

that dusky, Andalusian face, lighted up with those wonderful eyes, that brilliant smile.

And little Eudora never tried to withstand it. The captain's dark daughter held her the veriest slave in her inthrallments ere the first day's journey was done.

Miss Dandin had been all that is bright and bewitching; she had showered her radiant smiles and glances upon the pretty, fair-haired heiress; she had talked in that low, melodious voice of hers, until, spell-bound, Eudora was as desperately in love with the enchantress as one woman can be with another.

"How charming you are!" she cried, rapturously, once. "I never knew any one I loved so dearly in such a little while. If I were a man, Miss Dandin, I would be madly in love with you, I know."

Miss Dandin laughed, and a little of the bitterness of their first meeting dashed that silvery laugh.

"Why not," she said—"why not crown ourselves with roses before they fade? My life is mapped out for me; I am powerless to stir hand or foot to help myself. Why not make the best of my bondage, like any other serf? If one gets through life the easier for smiling and looking pretty, why not smile and look pretty? It is much pleasanter, after all, than eating one's heart out with repining and frowns."

Eudora looked puzzled.

"I don't understand you," she said, simply.

"No, I dare say not. There is a little fable of the Spartan boy and the fox. You have read it, *ma mie*, have you not? He hid it under his cloak, and it gnawed his vitals, and sometimes, in spite of him, the head of the monster peeped out. Well, that is my case. Don't wear that puzzled, wistful face, little one. I talk a great deal of nonsense, I suppose. It is part of my German education. Only I am glad you like me."

"And you," Eudora asked, earnestly, "you will try and like poor little me ever so slightly in return? I am not clever, I know, and you are; but, indeed, I love my friends dearly."

Miss Dandin bent over and kissed the pretty, pleading face.

"It is no such hard task, *m'amour*. It is very easy to care for you."

"And you will let me call you Valencia? I like that best. Fairy does not suit you at all. Regina, or Cleopatra, or Semiramis, seem yours by regal right."

"Or Aspasia, or Deilah, or Lucrezia, or any other name by which false and fatal sirens have been known. Call me as you please, my pet; I will never be false or fatal to you."

The captain's penniless daughter spoke with a certain air of

superb patronage to the Varneck heiress, which was natural and habitual to her.

She was so regal and queenly herself that she could not help looking down a little on this timid, soft-spoken, blue-eyed girl who clung to her so fondly.

Eudora looked mystified; but half the things Miss Dandin said, in her reckless way, perplexed the innocent school-girl.

"It is, as she says," Eudora concluded, "her foreign education. She has grown misty and metaphysical in Germany, and doesn't half understand herself."

Miss Dandin told Miss Varneck a good deal of her past life as the train whirled along over the pleasant summer land—of her life in Spain, where she had lived from her earliest recollection until her fourteenth year; of bright Valencia, the "Heaven of the Moors;" of the flowing Mediterranean, of the orange orchards, of the gilded domes and minarets, of the lofty palm-trees, and the lovely Alameda.

The Spanish eyes lighted into flashing splendor, and the red blood rose to the dusky cheeks as she talked.

"How nice it must be," the American heiress said, sympathetically. "Were you born there?"

Miss Dandin's glowing face clouded a little.

"I have reason to think not. I don't know where I was born. It is one of papa's secrets, I suppose. But I am a Valenciana, heart and soul. I wish I had died before I ever left it."

"How long since you left it?" Eudora asked.

"Over six years. I was a tall school-girl of fourteen when papa came and took me away. Since then I have been everywhere. There is not a capital of Europe I do not know. I hate to think of it—I hate to look back upon the gypsy, vagabond sort of existence that has been mine. Don't ever let us talk of it again. In Spain I was happy, and—yes, once, in a different way from that innocent, childish bliss—I was happy at Homburg. But that is all past and done with now."

A look of dark gloom overspread her face, and she would talk no more.

Eudora Varneck watched her, sitting moodily silent, gazing at the flitting landscape.

"Has she, too, loved and lost?" was her sentimental thought. "Is the trail of the serpent over all? What a grand and kingly creature he must have been!"

On the sunlit afternoon of their arrival, the captain's daughter looked curiously at the massive old house—at the

dozens of black faces, grinning a welcome—at the swelling meadows and sunlit lawns. It was all so new to her.

“A pretty place, is it not, Miss Dandin?” the colonel said, smiling fondly at his daughter’s enthusiasm—“though not such an Eden as you have been used to. What is it the record says about your native town, my fair Valenciana? That ‘the Moors did locate their Paradise on the Valencian shore, which was a fragment fallen from the Paradise in the sky.’”

“Your Glen Gower is beautiful,” Miss Dandin said, quietly. “You can hardly wish for a fairer earthly Eden.”

“And there is grandmamma and mamma waiting on the veranda!” cried Eudora. “Oh, papa, hurry—hurry!”

The carriage stopped. Eudora was the first to spring out and to rush impetuously up the steps and fling herself, with rapturous kisses, into the arms of the two women waiting there.

“Mamma, darling! Oh, grandma—grandmamma! How glad I am to be with you once again!”

“Not more glad than we to have you. Stand off and let us look at you. Why, how tall and how pretty the child has grown!”

It was grandmamma who spoke; Mrs. Gilbert Varneck had kissed her impetuous daughter, and turned to look for one far dearer—the husband of her idolatry.

She saw him, but at the same instant she saw also the noseless captain—her evil genius—the man she dreaded most on earth—the man she feared more than God who made her.

Her eight years had expired, and she had not thought of it. Her compact with this earthly Satan was at an end, and he held her, body and soul, in the hollow of his hand. She was utterly and beyond mortal aid in the power of this merciless wretch.

She uttered no cry. She grasped the slender pillar by which she stood, turning whiter than the dress she wore, a look of unutterable terror dilating the great eyes. She never glanced a second time at the daughter she had not seen for eight years.

“Captain Dandin!” Mme. Varneck exclaimed, sharply. “That ubiquitous captain. We see him the last thing at our departure, and we see him the first upon our return. Where on earth did your papa pick him up this time, Eudora? And who is that extremely handsome girl beside him?”

“His daughter, grandmamma—his ‘Fairy,’ as he calls her; and, oh! the dearest, sweetest, loveliest creature alive!”

"Of course—school-girl raptures! You are bosom friends—brothers in arms—sworn companions, of course. Really, she is beautiful, and stately as a young princess. Look, Eleanor, my dear. Your old friend the captain and his daughter. How came such a very ugly man to possess such a handsome child?"

"I see them," Eleanor Varneck answered, mechanically.

She could not move; she hardly seemed to breathe. She did not once look at the daughter. Every faculty of mind and body was absorbed in gazing at her deadly foe.

Colonel Varneck led the way, embraced his wife and mother, and presented his guests.

"An old friend and a new one claim a welcome, mother—Eleanor—Captain Dandin and his daughter."

"All friends, old and new, are welcome to Glen Gower," madame said, graciously. "Captain Dandin, I am happy to meet you once more. Miss Dandin, I bid you heartily welcome to our Maryland home."

Mrs. Gilbert Varneck came forward and held out her hand. Not once had her glittering eyes left the captain's face, but the florid captain's persistently refused to meet hers.

He bent over the hand she extended, pouring out his fulsome compliments, but his sinister orbs looked everywhere but in her pallid face.

"So glad! so happy! Dear ladies, it makes the old captain young again to see you both once more looking so fresh, so youthful, so well, so happy. And our beautiful Glen Gower—more beautiful than ever. Ah! how this is bliss! How this is heaven!"

"Where is your lordly guest, mother mine?" asked Colonel Varneck.

"Lounging somewhere among the trees, smoking his endless cigars. I never saw such a smoker. Sleeps with his cheroots in his mouth, I believe—at least, I know he gets up in the 'dead waste and middle of the night' to fumigate my curtains. It has been dull for him here, I am afraid, in your absence, Gilbert, although tortures wouldn't make him own it, of course. Run away, young ladies, to your rooms, and dress for dinner. Come, I will play conductress myself."

Mme. Varneck, brisk as ever, led the way, the two girls following. Eudora's old apartments were in readiness—Miss Dandin's room was somewhere near.

"Your luggage will come up directly, and I will send a couple of maids to help you dress," madame said.

"None for me, madame," interposed Miss Dandin. "I

am not accustomed to a maid. I would only find her in my way."

"As you please, my dear. If you are both speedy over your toilets, you will have time for a little walk before dinner."

"And if you finish first, Valencia," called Eudora, "come for me."

The trunks came up—the young ladies shut themselves in their rooms to dress.

Miss Dandin did finish first, and tapped at Miss Varneck's door, looking superbly handsome in a trailing robe of bright silk—purple in the shadow, deep red in the light, and with a blood-red rose gleaming in her black hair.

"Come in," Eudora said. "You look superb, Valencia—like a queen in a book, or like a Moorish princess. What an insignificant little object I am beside you, to be sure!"

She glanced ruefully at her own image in the glass. And yet she was looking very pretty, too, in a cloud of pink areo-phane, and pearls dangling from her shell-like ears.

"If you talk like that I shall think you want compliments," Valencia said, "and I never pay compliments. We both look well enough, I dare say. If you are dressed, I should like to take that walk your grandmother spoke of. I should like to go down to the sea yonder, and try to fancy it is my beloved Mediterranean once more."

"Come, then."

Eudora seized her hat—Miss Dandin flung over her head a black lace mantilla, in which she looked more like a Moorish princess than ever.

Seeing them both, you would surely have taken the captain's gorgeous daughter for the heiress—not the fair-haired school-girl beside her.

The veranda was deserted. The colonel and the captain were in their rooms. Mrs. Varneck had followed her husband in her devoted way, and old madame was superintending the arrangement of the dining-room.

"This way, dear," Eudora said.

She passed her arm, girl fashion, about her companion's waist and led her along the leafy arcades toward the shore.

Half-way down the woodland aisle they saw a man leaning against a tree, looking lazily at the slow wash of the waves, and smoking a cigar.

"It is grandmamma's guest," whispered Eudora, stopping suddenly and coloring. "I had forgotten him. It must be Lord Annesley."

“Who?”

Miss Varneck looked at her companion in surprise. She had spoken the word in a sharp, frightened tone she had never used before.

“Lord Annesley, an English nobleman, and a distant connection of grandmamma. Why, Valencia, what is the matter? You are as white as death. Surely you don’t know him?”

There was no reply. The deathly pallor that overspread the captain’s daughter’s face passed as quickly as it came.

She stood for a moment stock still, as though some shock had paralyzed her. Then she lifted her head, her eyes flashed, and her natural hue came back.

“Let us proceed,” she said, coldly. “We need not stop for this—stranger.”

“You surely don’t know him, Valencia?”

“I?” she laughed—a ringing laugh. “Is it likely, *petite*? He is an English ‘milor,’ and I am Captain Dandin’s daughter. How should I know him? Come on; he may not even see us.”

But he did see them. He turned on the instant and beheld the two figures—the little one in the rosy cloud, the tall one in the flashing silk.

He removed his cigar and looked again, just a trifle more interest in his lazy eyes than when he had looked at the waves.

“The heiress, no doubt,” he said—“the heiress, at last. But which is the heiress—the pink fairy or the purple princess? Good God!”—he started up as if he had been shot, and the cigar dropped—“Valencia Dandin!”

He stood there like a man petrified. The next instant the two young ladies passed, and he lifted his hat and made them a courtly bow. Miss Varneck, blushing brightly, returned it; but he scarcely saw her. He was staring with all his eyes at her companion.

The black eyes of the Spanish girl turned full upon him, with the cold stare of an utter stranger. She bent her stately head ever so slightly. Then they were past, and Lord Annesley was alone.

“You know him, Valencia,” Eudora said, quietly, “and he knows you. Never mind—I am not going to ask questions.”

Miss Dandin made no reply. Her dark face had turned stone cold and rigid as marble. Her great dark eyes looked straight before her at the red light on the sea.

Eudora leaned heavily against her shoulder and watched the rosy sunset fade, with her heart in her eyes.

The clanging of a great bell aroused them. They had been standing, making an exquisite tableau of themselves, for over half an hour. Valencia looked up and away, with a start.

"The tocsin of the soul—the dinner-bell," she said, with a forced laugh. "How we have stood dreaming here! Why, my little one, how pale you are, and how grave! Tired to death, no doubt; and I keep you standing mercilessly here."

Eudora turned to go, pale as a lily, indeed.

"No," she said, with a sigh, "not tired. It is the sunset, I think. I have so often watched the waves, with that very light upon them, at dear old Silver Shore; and I have been thinking of the days, Valencia, that can never come again."

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. VARNECK'S DIAMONDS.

THE long beech walk was entirely deserted when the two girls went back to the house. Neither spoke of the gentleman they had encountered there, but both thought of him as they passed the giant tree against which he had leaned.

"Can he be the man?" Eudora wondered. "He is handsome, certainly, though not in the least the magnificent being I should imagine Valencia Dandin in love with. Her hero ought to be Richard the Lion-hearted, or Robert Bruce, or Count Lara, or Edgar Ravenswood. Lord Annesley is what grandmamma called 'well-looking,' but he is no more to be compared to Launcelot Lauriston than a demi-god is to an ordinary mortal."

And then Miss Varneck sighed heavily once more, and thought what a poor, broken-hearted girl she was, and wondered if her fair-haired prince ever thought of her at all now.

Miss Dandin's face wore its look of darkest gloom as they sauntered up under the waving trees.

"It is Fate," she thought, bitterly; "and what is a poor wretch like I am, that I should try and do battle with Fate? I had thought never to see him again. I had hoped to forget the sharpest agony of my life in this far-off land, and lo! his face is one of the first to meet me. What does he here, I wonder? Has he come to marry the heiress?"

They found the whole family assembled in the dining-room, Mme. and Mrs. Varneck elegantly dressed, the colonel, the captain, and the tall stranger of the beech walk talking in a

little group—at least, the captain was doing the talking animatedly for the three.

“Here are our truants,” said madame. “We were about to send scouts in search of you. Did you lose yourselves in the woodland, young ladies?”

“Come hither, my Fairy,” cried the lively captain, “and behold an old friend. Who would imagine our obliging English acquaintance at Homburg would turn up the first day in Maryland?”

Valencia bowed low, the dark lashes sweeping proudly the pale cheeks. But she did not utter one word; she did not deign to glance at her “old friend.”

“Lord Annesley,” said Mme. Varneck, in her stateliest manner, “permit me to present you to my granddaughter, Miss Varneck. Eudora, my dear, this is our English kinsman of whom you have heard me speak.”

Eudora blushed like the sunset sky without. She felt ashamed even to look Lord Annesley in the face, with the recollection of grandmamma’s letter fresh in her mind.

It seemed to her as if he must know it, too. His polite formula sounded only like an unintelligible murmur in her ears, and before it was ended they were taking their places at table.

Miss Dandin’s seat was beside Lord Annesley, and Eudora watched them furtively during the progress of the dinner. Once or twice, when it seemed impossible to avoid it, he addressed her, and she had replied; but the words of both were studiously cool, the manner of both constrained. Only Eudora noticed it; her woman’s penetration guessed at the truth directly.

The English lord was undoubtedly handsome; not a bit like Miss Varneck’s ideal Englishman, with the florid face, and check pantaloons, and mutton-chop whiskers. Side-whiskers he decidedly wore, but they were brown and becoming, and the great brown eyes that looked at you lazily were singularly soft and beautiful.

He had brown hair and a pale face, with a certain tired look in it, as though the world and all things therein were an old story to him, and something of a weary one.

He looked *blasé*—in a word, the living incarnation of the celebrated doctrine, “There’s nothing new and nothing true, and it don’t signify.”

“I would like him ever so much—I know I would,” thought Eudora, “only they want me to marry him. Oh,

dear! why did grandmamma tell me that? I'll never get along with him now in the world."

During dinner, in a little lull in the talk, Colonel Varneck related the episode of his daughter's peril on Pirate's Rock.

"You are quite a heroine, Miss Varneck," Lord Annesley said, in his slow way—"a modern Grace Darling, with the story reversed. The hero of a sensational novel could not have acquitted himself more creditably, unless he took a 'header' after you in the boiling surf. By all the rules romantic, a love-match and a marriage should have been the result."

"Not too late yet, Annesley, perhaps," laughed her father, "only the hero mysteriously disappears. I go in search of him, and, behold! the heroic youth has fled, with 'his blushing honors thick upon him.'"

"How does he call himself?" asked grandma. "Really, gentlemen, jesting aside, he did too brave a deed to go unrewarded."

There was an awkward little pause after this simple question. Colonel Varneck had quite forgotten that part of the business.

"His name is Launcelot Lauriston," he replied, slowly, after that pause.

His wife and mother looked up sharply and suddenly.

"Lauriston! Launcelot Lauriston!" Mme. Varneck repeated. "Are you sure, Gilbert? That is a name one doesn't often hear, and—what is he like, this young man?"

"Ask Eudora," said her son. "I never saw him."

"Like papa," replied Eudora, whose cheeks were the hue of peonies, and whose eyes never left her plate. "His very image—twenty years younger."

There was a second pause, this time of blank consternation. Even Colonel Varneck stared aghast.

"Who are his parents?" asked madame, sharply. "Who is his father? Who knows? I am a Lauriston—I may find a kinsman."

"He has no father," her granddaughter answered. "Mrs. Lauriston is a widow, or, at least, I have been given to understand she was a deserted wife. He—Doctor Lauriston—told me once his father had left America before he was born, and had never returned since."

The silence of death fell. Colonel Varneck broke it this time.

"What was his father's name?" he inquired, in an altered voice.

"The same as his son's—Launcelot Lauriston."

Gilbert Varneck looked across the table at his wife. Not in any suspicion of the truth, but in densest dismay. He saw her white—white almost to ghastliness—but he thought it only the emotion excited by hearing that name.

"The most curious thing about the matter," pursued Eudora, gathering courage, "is that Mrs. Lauriston is the living image of mamma. More like her even than Launcelot is like you, papa. I never saw a resemblance so striking or so startling in my life. They might be twin sisters."

Mrs. Varneck uttered a gasping cry. For the first time, Captain Dandin lifted his glittering black eyes and fixed them full on her face with the look of a triumphant devil.

"This is inexplicable!" exclaimed Colonel Varneck, sorely troubled and mystified. "Dandin, did you know these people? If this likeness exists, you must have noticed it."

"Often, my colonel!" cried the captain, in his sprightliest tone. "And, bah! what does it signify? Mrs. Varneck has dark eyes and hair and regular features; Mrs. Lauriston is the fortunate possessor of the same. My nice boy Launcelot has blue eyes, rosy cheeks and fair hair; so had you, my colonel, at twenty years of age. So have hundreds of Saxons and Celts over the world. Again I cry—what does it signify? Bah! nothing. We see it every day; not so marked, perhaps, but we see it. I snap my fingers at it. It is no marvel at all."

"We see chance resemblances," said Eudora, boldly, piqued at the tone, "but nothing so marked as this. Even Squire Rayfield and his wife were struck by it when they saw papa. Mrs. Rayfield said Launcelot might be papa's own son!"

It was a most unfortunate speech. Scarcely was it uttered when poor Eudora's cheeks took fire, and blazed redder than the rose in Miss Dandin's hair.

"Let us hope he will be some day," said the captain, slowly and maliciously. "As Lord Annesley remarks, it would be a fitting end of a pretty story."

Poor Eudora! If the floor had only opened to swallow her! Tears of mortification actually rose in her eyes, but stately grandma came haughtily to the rescue.

"Your jest is rather marked, Captain Dandin," she said, in frigid reproof. "Eudora, my dear, don't wear that distressed face. We all understood you perfectly."

She gave the mystic signal as she spoke, and the ladies rose. Captain Dandin, not a whit abashed, sprung up and held the door open for them to pass.

"Ten million pardons!" he cried, in an impetuous whisper,

to Eudora. "I shall forgive myself never! Dear Miss Varneck, try to pardon the stupid old captain!"

Eudora bent her gentle head and passed by. She was not angry; she was only hurt. But grandmamma sailed on in queenly displeasure, and into the drawing-room.

The grand piano stood open. Eudora crossed over and swept her hands over the keys.

"How grand! What a superb instrument! You play, Valencia, of course?"

"Of course," with a smile. "We all play nowadays. Let me hear you."

Miss Varneck seated herself, and her fingers wandered off into "Le Rêve," that pet piece of school-girls.

She played well—nothing uncommonly brilliant, perhaps—but "The Dream" had been one of *his* favorites, and her heart went into her fingers.

Miss Dandin threw herself upon a crimson velvet sofa, making a vivid picture against a glowing background, and listened, with dreamy eyes.

Mrs. Varneck seated herself in a deep window recess, and looked steadfastly out at the silvery twilight gemmed with golden stars.

"It is coming," she thought, with a heart contracted in unutterable terror. "The doom I have dreaded is closing around me. Oh, my God! what will become of me when he knows all?"

The gentlemen entered while Eudora still played, and the silver sickle of the August moon was sailing up in shining glory over the sea.

"We come with the moonrise," exclaimed Captain Dandin, "back to Paradise and the Peris. Play on, Miss Varneck. Your music and this delicious twilight make even the stupid old captain young again. What, then, must be the effect on Lord Annesley?"

Lord Annesley looked down the long drawing-room and took in a picture never to be forgotten. The dark girl in the shadow, her shining silk robe flashing fitfully, and the fairy figure with the amber hair at the piano, with all the moonlight on the sweet young face. It haunted him for many a day.

"Ah! she will go!" the captain cried, pathetically, as Eudora arose. "I plead in vain! I never before thought you could be merciless, Miss Varneck."

"I want Valencia to play," Miss Varneck said. "I am

sure she plays far better than I do. Persuade her captain—you, my lord."

"I need no persuasions," Miss Dandin said, rising hastily.

"I am quite ready. What shall it be?"

"Whatever you please. Your own favorite."

"I have none."

She took up the first sheet of music she met, placed it before her, and began at once. It was a modern fantasia, brilliant, meaningless, and she played it well.

"Bah!" said the captain; "that is nothing. Sing for us, my Fairy."

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Not this evening. I don't feel inclined."

"You sing?" said the heiress. "But I might have known it. How much I should like to hear you!"

"She sings like—how is it you call her?—the beatified lady in the pictures with the harp, and the yellow, full moon around her head. Ah, St. Cecilia! You should hear her sing our Spanish romances with the guitar. You have, my lord."

"And should very much like to again," Lord Annesley said, thus appealed to; "but it were presumption in me to ask."

Miss Dandin scarcely waited to hear this answer. She dashed off into a very *pot-pourri* of airs, stormily loud, that effectually drowned the discussion.

"When a woman won't, she won't," remarked the captain, with one of his shrugs. "My willful Fairy won't sing for us to-night."

He glanced across as he spoke into the window recess. Colonel Varneck stood there now by his wife's side, talking earnestly, with a troubled face.

"I can't understand it in the least," he said, in densest perplexity. "What do you make of it, Eleanor—the strange likeness these people, mother and son, bear to you and me—the singular coincidence of names and facts?"

"What you make of it yourself—a singular coincidence," his wife answered, looking out at the misty moonlight; "nothing more. These things puzzle the wisest of us every day. Half the resemblance is imaginary, no doubt."

"Perhaps so; and yet"—he paused and knit his brows—"I'll find this Mrs. Lauriston and her son!" he exclaimed, with sudden energy. "I'll see for myself. It can be no such difficult task to hunt them up."

Eleanor Varneck made no reply; she sat steadfastly regard-

ing the starry sky. Practical Mme. Varneck rang for lights, joined them in their recess, and changed the conversation.

Miss Dandin arose from the piano as the soft lamp-light flooded the room, and madame's voice was heard calling across:

"Come here, young ladies. You two should be interested in this matter. Let us have your opinion."

"On a most important subject, mesdemoiselles," said her son. "Grandmamma is going to give a grand ball, and invite half Maryland."

Eudora uttered a little cry of ecstasy. She was broken-hearted, of course, but she could eat, drink—ay, and be merry, too, though her fair-haired King Olaf was lost forever.

It sounds heartless; but then eighteen is such a very elastic age, and a first ball is such an ecstatic matter.

"A ball! Oh, grandmamma! And I never was at a ball in all my life!"

"Of course not. You are to make your *début*. Miss Varneck, of Glen Gower, must be launched into society sooner or later. Why not at once? The question is, when shall it be?"

"Oh, at once, grandmamma! Isn't it delightful, Valencia? But then, I suppose, it will be no novelty to you. You have been at balls before."

Perhaps Miss Dandin did not hear; she certainly did not reply.

Lord Annesley most unexpectedly answered for her.

"I can reply for Miss Dandin," he said, in his slow, *train-ante* voice. "The last place I saw her was as the belle of a brilliant ball."

Valencia was approaching Eudora as he spoke. She lifted her dark eyes in one long glance of passionate reproach.

"You do well," she said, in a bitter under-tone, "to remind me of that—you, of all men alive!"

Eudora caught both the words and the glance. The next instant Valencia was standing by her side, her arms encircling the little heiress.

"It will not be my first ball," she said, in her softest, sweetest tone. "I made my *début* very early in life. But I have no doubt I shall be quite as charmed with this as you."

"And, Eleanor," madame said, turning in her brisk way to her daughter-in-law, "you must wear your diamonds that night. They have lain in hiding eight years. The Varneck diamonds must light up grandmamma's ball."

"Diamonds!" exclaimed Eudora, clapping her little hands. "How grand it all sounds! The Varneck diamonds, too! and I know as little of diamonds as I do of balls. I have a faint,

childish recollection of seeing them shine in untold splendor on mamma's neck and arms long ago. Where are they hid?"

"In the strong-room of a bank," answered madame. "Papa shall ride to Baltimore and fetch them to-morrow, and you will have your bright eyes dazzled once again, my enthusiastic little girl."

No one saw the face of Gilbert Varneck's wife—sitting deep in that friendly shadow—not even Captain Dandin; but he knew, without seeing, the chalky pallor that blanched it.

It was very pleasant that first evening in the long, lamp-lit drawing-room of Glen Gower. They had their own secret troubles, perhaps, all of them—Eudora, in the loss of her lover; Gilbert Varneck, in his haunting perplexity about that queer coincidence of names and facts; his wife, in her deep, untold terror; and Valencia Dandin, in those secret troubles that darkened her young life.

But, outwardly, all was sunshine and peace. The brilliant captain was at his best; Lord Annesley devoted himself to the heiress, and talked better than any man that young lady had ever listened to; and Miss Dandin went back to the piano and played soft, dreamy melodies full of passionate pain.

Colonel Varneck rode to Baltimore early next morning, and returned in time for dinner. He went straight to his wife's dressing-room and laid before her a mahogany box strongly clasped with brass and doubly locked.

Madame was there, and Eudora in dinner-dress.

"The Varneck diamonds, ladies," he said. "Prepare to be dazzled, my unsophisticated little heiress."

Again that chalky pallor crept over Eleanor Varneck's face, leaving it a dull leaden white; but madame and her granddaughter were altogether too much absorbed in the contents of the brass-bound box to notice.

"The key, papa—the key!" his daughter cried. "Open, quick, before the bell rings!"

"I keep the key," said madame, producing it, suspended by a black ribbon around her neck. "Do you think I would trust any one so careless as papa with the key of the family treasure? I have worn it for the past eight years."

She turned the key sharply and threw open the lid. Inside the mahogany box was a richly inlaid casket of ebony and gold.

Madame touched a little shining spring, and the top of the casket flew back. There, on purple velvet, lay the Varneck diamonds.

Eudora gave a girlish cry of admiration at the flashing stones and the rich setting.

The leaden pallor of Eleanor Varneck's face deepened, and her breath came thick and short; but madame, after one keen glance, gave a spasmodic start, grasped a necklace suddenly and held it up.

"Great Heaven!" she cried; "what does this mean?"

"What?" Her son spoke the word, striding forward.

"What is wrong, mother? The jewels are there."

She dropped the necklace, lifted a bracelet, lifted ear-rings and finger-rings, and threw all back with a shrill cry.

"All is wrong!" she exclaimed, wildly; "the diamonds are gone!"

"Gone!" Colonel Varneck stared at her aghast. "What on earth do you mean, mother? The diamonds are here."

"Those things"—she lifted them up and flung them, in passionate scorn, upon the floor—"those worthless pieces of glass? I tell you they are sham—paste brilliants—miserable rubbish! Eleanor Varneck," with a second shrill cry, "where are the diamonds I gave you?"

But Eleanor Varneck was quite incapable of reply. She leaned heavily against the dressing-table, white as death.

"You are frightening my wife, mother," Gilbert said; "don't be so vehement. Eleanor, my dear, can you explain?"

"No"—she forced the word from her leaden lips—"only she must be mistaken. These are the diamonds she gave me."

"I tell you they are not!" madame exclaimed, passionately.

"Do you think I do not know? They are imitation—a clever imitation, no doubt; but they can not deceive me; they could not for a second deceive any experienced jeweler. The diamonds have been stolen, and these paste shams substituted. But how—how, in Heaven's name, has it been done?"

"How do I know?" Mrs. Varneck said, in her utter desperation. "If the diamonds have been stolen, I had no hand in the business. The diamonds you gave me I placed in that box, and Gilbert himself took it to the bank. It has been done there."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Colonel Varneck, energetically. "What you placed in the bank you have received back. Eleanor. If a robbery has been committed, it was done eight years ago, before we left Maryland."

Mme. Varneck turned her eyes upon her son's wife with a look of unutterable solemnity.

"Eleanor," she said, "I will not reproach you now for

your carelessness, since you are likely to pay such a terrible price for this loss. Perhaps I should have told you the penalty attaching to the loss of these jewels when I gave them to you, but I really thought no one would be so reprehensibly careless. Eleanor, a terrible prediction clings to these diamonds—a prediction that was once fulfilled; that may be—though Heaven forefend!—fulfilled again.”

“Mother, what do you mean?” asked her son. “What is the prediction?”

“That the woman of our house who loses these diamonds shall die a violent and tragic death! Once, in the person of their possessor—my paternal grandmother—that prediction was fulfilled. She lost them, and within six months she was burned alive in her own home. The diamonds were recovered; they have never been lost or mislaid since—until now. May Heaven have mercy and avert the doom; but, Eleanor, I fear—I fear—”

A cry from her granddaughter interrupted her. Eleanor Varneck, listening to these horrible words, and wrought up already to the strongest pitch of excitement, had swayed backward, tottered, and, without word or cry, fallen senseless on her husband’s breast.

There was one listener to this conversation no one dreamed of. The dressing-room windows stood wide open in the heat of an August afternoon, and Captain Dandin, smoking his cigar beneath, like Love among the roses, had heard every word.

At the sudden confusion attendant upon Mrs. Varneck’s swoon, he threw his cigar away and moved off toward the house, with a diabolical smile making uglier his ugly face.

“Madame Varneck knows the clever shams I sent from New York, then,” he thought. “I wonder if she will recognize the real gems as readily? You’re a wonderful old lady, my imperious dowager, and I’ll put your powers to the test upon the night of the ball. As for your family prediction, I think it is extremely likely to be verified. What will you say, my grand dame, when you see the Varneck diamonds ablaze on Captain Dandin’s portionless daughter?”

CHAPTER IX.

THE DIAMOND BRACELET.

COLONEL VARNECK stood alone under the waving trees, leaning against a hoary oak, smoking and looking at the wide sea. His face looked darkly thoughtful under the shadow of

his broad hat, and his brows were knit in perplexity. An atmosphere of mystery and suspicion was closing around him, and he felt half stifled already. Vague doubts filled him; something was wrong somewhere—where, he could not tell; he was even afraid to ask.

There was the rustle of a woman's dress behind him. He turned round and saw his mother approaching.

"I have been searching for you everywhere, Gilbert," she said. "Eudora told me I would find you here. I want to speak to you about this miserable business of the diamonds."

Her face looked darker even than her son's; but there was a resolute fire in her eyes, a determined compression of her firm mouth, that told she had come to say something important, and was bent on saying it.

"Well?" Gilbert Varneck said, with a voice of hard endurance. Some inward prescience warned him of the unpleasant words to come.

"Gilbert, there is more in this matter than meets the eye. At the risk of offending you seriously, I must say your wife knows more than she is willing to tell."

"I knew you were going to say that," her son answered.

"You mean, mother, Eleanor has stolen her own diamonds."

"You put it more plainly than I should have done. But I don't quite think that, either. Your wife admired those jewels a great deal too much to part with them lightly. If she has made away with them, necessity alone compelled her."

"What necessity? She had all the money she wanted."

"She may have contracted debts during the years of your separation, of which she has never spoken to you. One thing is certain: those jewels went with her knowledge. These substitutes were ordered by her, and locked in that box with her own hands. She trusted to time and the chapter of accidents, no doubt, to conceal the deception; but she trusted in vain. The Varneck diamonds have a fate attached to them, and will not be lost nor made away with with impunity."

"What nonsense, mother! You don't really believe that old superstition?"

"I really do—as implicitly as I believe you are my own son. It was verified once—it will be verified again. I regret more deeply than I can say the loss of our family heir-looms. I regret their value—fully twenty thousand pounds—but I regret, most of all, the doom your wife has incurred. It will fall, Gilbert, believe me."

"One would think you almost hoped it might," her son said, bitterly.

"That reproach, at least, is unmerited," Mme. Varneck replied, with quiet dignity. "Since the woman you married first entered this house I have striven in every way to treat her, to think of her, to love her as my own daughter. If I have failed, the fault has not been mine."

"You have failed, then?"

"Gilbert, I can not like your wife—I can not. I can not even trust her. The truth must be spoken, even at the risk of displeasing you. She hides something from us all; there are secrets in the life that lies behind her she will not reveal. Something is wrong. She knew Captain Dandin before he ever crossed the threshold of this house."

Colonel Varneck started violently.

"Impossible, mother—utterly, wildly impossible! Captain Dandin came direct from Spain with me; he had not been in America for many years before. It is the wildest impossibility that they could ever have met before."

"Then why is there a secret understanding between them? Why does she blanch at the sound of his name, at his entrance into the room? Why does he look at her with that sinister, triumphant light in his eyes, and why does she cower and shrink before it? I don't pretend to understand the matter—we are groping blindly in the dark—but I know the facts are as I have stated them."

There was a dead pause. Deep in Gilbert Varneck's heart—so deep that it had never arisen to the surface before—lurked, from the first, doubt and distrust of his wife. The love of his youth seemed to have burned itself out into dead ashes, and dead ashes are terribly hard to rekindle. He had striven to love her; but the love that is forced is a love worth very little. And now, here was his mother, with her horrible doubts and suspicions—a frightful echo of his own.

"I have thought sometimes, Gilbert," madame said, slowly, after that pause—"a wild and improbable thought, yet which has forced itself upon me again and again—can you have made some dreadful mistake? What if, after all, this woman is not the wife of your youth?"

Gilbert Varneck burst into a loud laugh—a laugh that had very little of mirth in it.

"My dear mother," he said, "you did well to tell me your fancy was wild and improbable. I should never have given practical Madame Varneck credit for such a flight of imagination as that. Not my wife! Do you think I have been blind, and in a dream, for the past eight years?"

And yet, even while he spoke the words, a new-born terror clutched his heart like the grip of an iron hand.

If the woman he had remarried at Glen Gower were really the wife of his first youth, then had she changed as surely never woman changed before.

"I have read of such things being done," madame said, with an uneasy feeling of shame that she was fanciful—"twin brothers and twin sisters passing for each other. Even cousins sometimes bear the strongest family resemblance. And remember, Gilbert, you had not seen your wife for ten years."

"Ten years could not make me forget how she looked, nor make another woman grow into her very image. Ten years could not give her all the information she possessed of me and my previous life. And then the marriage certificate, my picture, letters— Oh, mother, mother! this last is the maddest of all mad ideas."

There was a second pause. Madame passed her hand over her knitted brow with a heavy sigh.

"Heaven help us! It is the blind leading the blind here. All is wrong, and yet we can not see where the wrong begins or ends. Gilbert," suddenly and sharply, "how strange this story is about Mrs. Lauriston and her son!"

"Most strange—most remarkable; and yet, no doubt, a mere coincidence."

"But so many coincidences: The name—an uncommon name in itself, and which one does not hear thrice in a lifetime; the fact of her striking resemblance to Eleanor—remember Eudora's words, 'she might be her twin sister;' the young man Launcelot Lauriston's remarkable likeness to you; the desertion of Mrs. Lauriston's husband the first year of their marriage, twenty years ago. Gilbert, there is something more than mere coincidence here."

"Mother, for pity's sake, stop! My head is in a whirl! What in Heaven's name do you mean? That this Mrs. Lauriston is my wife, and not Eleanor? That Launcelot Lauriston is my son, and Eudora is— What is Eudora?"

"Ah, if I only knew! I dare not say that, Gilbert; but I do say that, in your place, I would never rest until I found Mrs. Lauriston and her son, and saw and heard their history for myself."

"Well, that at least is something tangible. I can do that. But nothing will come of it, depend upon it. Remember, Captain Dandin knows them, and see how lightly he treats it."

"That for Captain Dandin!" exclaimed madame, snapping her fingers. "I wouldn't trust your noseless friend as far as

I could see him. His treating the matter with such elaborate indifference is, to my mind, a suspicious fact of itself. And if you recollect at dinner, while Eudora spoke, your wife almost fainted, Gilbert."

Yes, he remembered perfectly the ghastly pallor that overspread her face, the affrighted light in her eyes.

"Mother, you are enough to drive a man mad!" he burst out, in ungovernable excitement. "For God's sake, let me alone! One would think we hated Eleanor, and were trying with all our might to prove her the guiltiest, most abandoned wretch alive! My wife has no sister; she never had. Eleanor is my wife; Eudora is my daughter; all our talk is crazy improbability, fit only for the plot of a sensation novel. Let me alone! I will not believe she is the vile creature you make her out. I won't believe it! She knows nothing of Dandin; she never did; there is no secret understanding. She is as ignorant as you or I of the stolen jewels, and we deserve to be flayed alive for harboring such base suspicions. I beg your pardon, mother, but I can't help being vehement. Remember, she is my wife."

"I forget nothing," madame answered, more in sorrow than in anger. "Your outburst of feeling is quite natural, my dear boy. It does you credit. At the same time, as a favor to me, seek out this widow and her son."

"That is easily done. I will set about it at once. That is not reason to anybody. I owe the young man a heavy debt for twice saving my daughter's life. I promise you this, mother. And now leave me alone for a little. Like worthy John Bunyan, 'I am tumbled up and down, and grievously tossed about in my mind.' I want a long, solitary smoke to restore my mental equilibrium."

Mme. Varneck turned slowly and went back to the house. She had established, almost unconsciously, a system of espionage upon the daughter-in-law she distrusted and the guest she disliked.

But nothing ever came of it. There were no clandestine meetings, no private interviews. Mrs. Gilbert shunned the noseless captain only too palpably; and he, on his part, showed no desire to hasten matters to a crisis.

There was one other *surveillant* at Glen Gower—Miss Varneck—and the persons she watched were Lord Annesley and Miss Dandin. She had woven the prettiest little romance for these two people.

There had been "love passages" between them in the past, she felt certain, and with the instinct of the sex for match-

making she thought how delightful it would be to smooth the turbid course of true love, and bring them together once more.

She didn't want him herself, so she could afford to be magnanimous; her heart was broken to atoms, but that was no reason why she should not bind up the bleeding hearts of others.

"She never would avoid him so persistently, or look at him in the strange way she does, or speak to him with such studied coldness and hauteur, if she did not love him," argued the romantic little heiress; "and I don't see how he can help being in love with her, for she is the most beautiful and bewitching creature the sun shines on. I dare say it is because she is poor, and Lord Clarence Annesley, though next heir to an earldom, is rich in nothing but a lofty name and a long pedigree. As if such things mattered, especially to an American girl like me. I'm surprised at grandmamma. Oh, if Launcelot would only forgive me and come back, even she would own he is good enough, and noble enough, and handsome enough, for a prince."

But all the diplomatic maneuvers of the little heiress were in vain. The crooked things would not straighten, and people would persist in making themselves miserable in spite of her. Miss Dandin and Lord Annesley would not come to an understanding, do what she would. They were elaborately civil to each other, but let the captain's daughter be in ever so bright and genial a mood, the entrance of the stately Englishman was like the entrance of a blast of Arctic wind—it froze her into an iceberg at once. She avoided him—in no marked or palpable way, but she avoided him steadily and effectually, and donned her armor of steel the moment he came in sight.

"Does Lord Annesley see it, I wonder?" puzzled Eudora thought, sometimes. "If he loves her, if he ever loved her, how can he bear such freezing coldness and repulsion?"

And then the image of her blue-eyed demi-god arose before her—vehement, impetuous, passionate Launcelot. Ah! how differently he would act from this cold-blooded, lymphatic young lordling—how imperiously he would storm and rave, and break down all barriers, and know his fate at once!

"It's the blue blood showing, I suppose," Miss Varneck mused. "It's aristocratic, and high-bred, and patrician, and all that, this uplifted indifference; but if I were Valencia, I wouldn't endure it. And then, in his way, he makes love to me."

Which was quite true—in his way; a very lazy and Grand

Mogul sort of way, no doubt, but still according to his light. He made love to the pretty heiress of Glen Gower in a languid and lordly manner that rather awed that little damsel. He was her constant cavalier, riding, walking, sailing; he read to her on rainy afternoons, and, oh! how that musical legato voice could read Tennyson and Owen Meredith! It made even Eudora half in love with him. He held her silks, and turned her music, and gave her flowers, and talked to her by the hour, and ignored Miss Valencia Dandin, in his own lordly way, utterly and completely. And Miss Dandin listened and looked on with a proud, calm face that never changed in its matchless composure.

"I can never reconcile these two, and it will end in his making me like him, whether I will or not," Eudora thought, ruefully. "He is without exception—yes, without exception—the most agreeable gentleman I ever met, and his manner of reading 'Locksley Hall' is perfectly irresistible. I shall never forget Launcelot, of course; but if Valencia won't make up, and if Lord Annesley asks me, and if grandmamma insists, what am I to do? I'll speak to Valencia myself, and see what effect that will have."

Miss Varneck kept her word. She sought out Miss Dandin, and found her sitting alone in her room, looking out at the misty twilight. It was a peculiarity of this young lady that you never found her reading or working—always sitting with those listless, folded hands. The great, dark eyes looked straight now at the gray horizon line, and at the pale glimmer of a faint new moon. It was very near the close of August, and it was also the eve of grandmamma's ball.

"All alone, you solemn Valencia!" Eudora said, "weaving sentimental fancies in the twilight. The house is as still as a tomb. Mamma is in her room; papa and Lord Annesley are smoking under the trees; Captain Dandin has been gone all day to Baltimore, and Valencia turns recluse, and gazes solitary and alone at the rising moon. Even the workmen have departed, and the servants are off to a banjo breakdown. Poor little Eudora is left to wander about like a disconsolate, forsaken ghost."

Miss Dandin smiled—that rare, bright smile that lighted up her dusky face so beautifully. She was very fond of the gentle little heiress, in her superb way.

"Eudora is very rarely left to make that complaint, I think. I fancied you had gone for a walk."

"With his lordship? Oh, yes; but we returned ages ago. He is too lazy to walk far—is Lord Annesley. By the way,

what a sly-boots you are, Valencia! You never told me you used to know him."

She looked up eagerly, but the face of the captain's daughter was masked in changeless calm.

"Did I not? It would be a more difficult task than I should undertake to keep you *au courant* of all my gentleman acquaintances, my pet. How was I to know I would meet one of them in this strange land?"

"But when you did meet him—the first evening in the beech walk—even then, Valencia, you did not tell."

"No; but, then, I am an oddity. And what did it matter? If you are so curious, my dear, it is not too late yet. I met Lord Annesley two years ago, at Homburg. We saw a good deal of each other—at the *table d'hôte*, at the Kursaal, on the public promenades, everywhere. We met last at a ball—you heard him allude to it. Papa and I left Homburg next day. I never saw him since until I met him, face to face, a fortnight ago, out yonder under the trees. I confess I was surprised—I would as soon have expected to see the pope smoking a cigar in Maryland. There, my dear, you have the whole history. I hope you are satisfied."

"And that is all?" Eudora said, slowly.

"What more would you have? I know a hundred Englishmen—met in the same manner—any one of whom I would be equally surprised to meet again here."

There was a pause. The twilight had deepened, the new moon sailed up crystal clear, the stars swung over the tree-tops, and the faint sound of gay music came floating from the negro quarters.

"Well," Eudora said, at last, nestling closer to her friend, "I am very silly, then, after all. I did think— But I don't like to say what I thought. You are so proud, my queenly Valencia, and I might offend without meaning it."

Miss Dandin's black eyes turned full upon the speaker. She was very pale, but that might be the effect of the spectral twilight.

"I don't think you could offend me if you tried, my little Eudora; but if you have any doubt, better leave your thought unsaid. It is always safer. See, there is papa riding back from the city. I wonder what business takes him there so often?"

Miss Varneck wondered, too, and thought no more about it. If she had known that it was to hunt up her recusant lover, she would probably have felt considerably more interest in the matter.

Launcelot Lauriston and his mother had not yet arrived in Baltimore, but were expected every day; so old Dr. Brithwood told the captain.

"I will mention your name to Doctor Lauriston, and he will drop you a line as soon as he arrives," the old physician said. "He will surely be here to-morrow."

Captain Dandin concluded to wait for the line, and not ride back to the city on the morrow. Grandma's ball came off that night, and he would need all his energies, unfatigued, to be duly brilliant upon the occasion.

The day was lovely; the evening warm, but delightful. All the doors and windows of the old mansion were thrown wide open; festoons of colored lamps turned the grounds into fairy-land, and lights, and flowers, and evergreens made rooms and stair-ways splendid.

The billiard-room was waxed and decorated, and fitted up for dancing, and the musicians were coming from Baltimore.

It was not altogether true that "half Maryland was invited," but certainly the number of guests bidden was great.

As the evening advanced, and the first roll of carriages began to be heard, Valencia Dandin stood before the mirror, putting the finishing touches to her toilet.

Brilliantly handsome she looked—stately and beautiful as a young queen. Her robe of dark-blue silk swept the carpet in shining folds, out of which her shoulders gleamed like ivory. Brunette as she was, the brilliant mazarine blue became her wonderfully—the creamy-tinted skin shone against it daz- zlingly. A cluster of rich white roses gleamed in the purplish blackness of her hair, and were the sole ornaments she wore.

As she stood there alone there came a soft rap at the door. She crossed over and opened it, and saw her father.

"Dressed, my Fairy?" he said; "and, as usual, looking beautiful. How the wax-doll heiress will be eclipsed to-night! May papa come in?"

"Come in."

She held the door open and admitted him, then stood looking in calm inquiry.

"Blue silk and white roses! Nothing could be in better taste—nothing more exquisitely becoming. But I have brought my Fairy a present beautiful as herself. Behold!"

He held in his hand a tiny parcel. He tore off the wrapper as he spoke, and displayed, in the lamp-light, a diamond bracelet.

"*Voilà*, my Fairy! See it gleam—see it flash. Is it not superb? Will it not shine gorgeously on this fair arm? Is it

not a fitting gift for a princess? Hold out your arm, my peerless; thy devoted father himself will clasp it on."

But Valencia Dandin drew suddenly back. It was all the captain said of it—beautiful, superb. It flashed in the light of the lamps with dazzling radiance, but the captain's daughter was not dazzled. She drew back, with a set, unsmiling face.

"You are very good," she spoke, calmly, almost coldly. "But, no; diamonds and Valencia Dandin were never made for each other. Your bracelet is beautiful, but—I can not wear it."

"And why not, my Fairy?"

He asked the question without one sign of anger or mortification in face or voice.

"I have told you Captain Dandin's portionless daughter can not wear diamonds. I will remain as I am. Who cares what I wear?"

"I do, my Fairy. And you shall blaze in diamonds yet. Take the bracelet."

"No."

"I am your father, my Fairy—I command you to take it." She looked him full in the face.

"Father, you are a poor man—how do you come to possess diamond bracelets?"

"Ah! now we get at the heart of the matter. I thought we would. My Fairy fears I have stolen it. Is that it?"

"How do you come to possess it?" she repeated, steadily.

"Shall I tell you? Yes, I will—the time has come for that. Fear nothing, my Fairy—wear your bracelet in peace—your father was never a thief. Eight years ago that bracelet was given to me by—your mother."

"My mother?" She caught her breath with a gasp. "Father—father! are you speaking the truth?"

"Can my Fairy doubt it? 'Ah! how keener than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!' I speak the truth, my Fairy—this bracelet was your mother's. Your mother gave it to me with her own hands."

She stood looking at him, a wild, eager light in her eyes.

"You promised me once, father, that I should see my mother. Is she still alive?"

"Alive and well, and you shall see her. Before the autumn winds blow, my Fairy and her mother shall stand face to face."

"Then she is here?" breathlessly—"in America?"

"In America, beyond a doubt. Wear your bracelet, my

own. If any one asks you where you got it, tell them it was your mother's, and that you wear it for her sake."

He took the firm, white arm as he spoke and clasped the bracelet securely. She stood still as a statue and watched him. When he finished he kissed the olive cheek with the brightest smile.

"The heiress of all the Varnecks will wear nothing half so splendid to-night. The captain's daughter will outshine in splendor as in beauty the namby-pamby heiress of Glen Gower."

He left the room with these words, his sinister smile at its brightest, the gleam of his eye bright with triumphant malice.

And Valencia still stood like a statue where he had left her, gazing on her mother's bracelet.

CHAPTER X.

GRANDMAMMA'S BALL.

THE heiress and the captain's daughter descended together. Looking like some fairy sprite, in misty white crêpe and point lace, pearls clasping back the tinseled ringlets, pearls glimmering in cloudy luster on the lovely neck, Eudora Varneck floated into her friend's room.

At sight of the gorgeous Valencia, she paused in the doorway with a little feminine cry.

"How beautiful you look! how well blue becomes you! Valencia, I think everything becomes you. You are perfectly radiant to-night. And, oh!"—Miss Varneck caught her breath with a second thrilling cry—"oh, Valencia, what a magnificent bracelet!"

"Yes," Valencia said, "it is magnificent. Papa came here just now and insisted upon my wearing it."

"Insisted? As if it needed that! Real diamonds, too, Valencia. See how they blaze in the light. Miss Dandin, you will be the best-dressed lady at the ball."

"Will I?" She sighed wearily as she spoke. "What does it matter, *petite*? The wise man was right—it is all vanity and vexation of spirit, after all. Let us go down."

"Tell me first how I look?"

"As you always do, my little one—sweet and fresh as a rosebud. Come."

The two girls descended together. It was still early, and but few guests had arrived.

Grandmamma, rustling in satin and old point yellow with

age, was in the drawing-room, and Colonel and Mrs. Varneck were making themselves agreeable to those early arrivals.

Mrs. Varneck chose to wear black velvet to-night, and her handsome face shone marble white against its darkness. The diamonds that had come from the bankers did not light up, on her fair person, Mme. Varneck's ball.

Captain Dandin had not yet left his room. Lord Annesley was nowhere to be seen. Grandmamma stood alone at the instant the young ladies entered. She looked down the long vista of lights and flowers—at the tall, blue figure and the tiny white one—and a frown darkened her face.

"That girl is superbly handsome," she thought. "My poor little granddaughter is nowhere beside her. It is a little too bad that Captain Dandin's daughter will not permit the heiress of Glen Gower to be the belle of her own ball."

There was no trace of the ungracious thought, however, in the smiling face she turned to the two girls.

"You are looking charming—both—your very best, as I told you to look. Eudora, you should never wear anything but white; and you, Miss Dandin, seem more like a princess in a fairy-tale than an every-day mortal. I pity our young men already; they can not all win you, and all are sure to be bewitched. Why—"

She stopped suddenly. Her eyes had fallen for the first time upon the diamond bracelet.

"Valencia's bracelet, grandmamma. I knew you would admire it—you who are such a judge of diamonds. Did you ever see anything more superb?"

Mme. Varneck had grown very pale, and the welcoming smile faded from her face. She took Miss Dandin's wrist in her hand, and gazed long and earnestly at the shining ornament.

"I will take it off if you wish to examine it," the captain's daughter said, quietly. "It is very handsome, certainly, and very valuable, I dare say."

She unclasped it as she spoke and handed it to madame.

The old lady's fingers trembled as she took it.

"Have you had this bracelet long?" she asked, her voice trembling as well.

"I never saw it before to-night. Papa came into my room just now and gave it to me."

"Did he purchase it for the occasion? It is an exquisite present."

"No," Miss Dandin said, "I fancy not. In fact, he told

me he has had it for the past eight years. It—it belonged to my mother."

"To your mother?" madame spoke sharply and suddenly, always her wont when excited—"to your mother, did he say? And he has had it for the past eight years? Look here, Miss Dandin"—she pressed a spring in the back, and a tiny golden door flew open—"did your father show you this?"

There was a portrait inside the bracelet—the smallest of miniatures, perfectly done. It was the picture of a woman's face, and beneath were the wedded initials, "L. L. L."

"Laura Letitia Lauriston!" madame exclaimed, her eyes literally flashing. "Did your father show you this, Miss Dandin?"

Miss Dandin looked at the speaker in ungovernable surprise, not unmixed with a kind of terror. What did it mean? There was no mistaking the angry surprise and excitement in madame's face.

"Why, grandmamma," Eudora said, "how do you come to know all this? Have you ever seen Captain Dandin's bracelet before?"

"Captain Dandin's bracelet?" madame repeated, in uncontrollable scorn; then, suddenly wheeling round, she called: "Eleanor, pray come here one moment."

Mrs. Gilbert Varneck sailed over, her black velvet robes sweeping the carpet.

"I wish to show you something singularly handsome," grandmamma said, fixing her eyes with an eagle glance on her son's wife—literally an eagle glance, sidelong, piercing—"Miss Dandin's bracelet, presented to her by her father to-night. It has been in his possession for the past eight years. Before that time it was the property of Miss Dandin's mother. I wish you to tell me if you ever saw anything like it before. Look here."

She flashed the bracelet full in the dazzled eyes of Gilbert Varneck's wife, keeping her own piercingly riveted on her face.

"Look!" she cried. "See this portrait in the back. Even Miss Dandin did not know of this. See those intertwined initials, 'L. L. L.,' underneath, encircled by the nettle wreath. Tell me, Eleanor, did you ever see this bracelet before?"

But Eleanor Varneck did not reply. That livid, chalky pallor crept over her face, showing through the powder she wore. Her eyes dilated in horror as intense as though the bracelet were a live cobra coiled for the fatal spring. She stood there rooted, transfixed with mortal fear.

"I am answered," madame said, icily. She closed the spring, and lifted Valencia's arm. "Let me reclasp your bracelet, Miss Dandin. It is very beautiful, and Mrs. Varneck admires it quite as much as I do. Eleanor, perhaps you had better return to Judge Danvers."

Mechanically, without a word, Eleanor Varneck moved away. A fresh influx of guests appearing at the same instant, madame went forward to receive them, and the two girls were left alone.

"How strange!" Eudora said; "how queerly grandma looked and spoke and acted! And mamma! Where on earth can they have seen your bracelet before?"

"How can I tell?" Valencia replied, slowly. "It is another of my father's secrets, very likely. You and I are puppets in the hands of our elders. We must let them dance us as they please. There is your father calling you, Eudora—go."

Eudora flitted away. Hanging upon papa's arm, she received the guests presented with timid grace, looking like a very rosebud, as Valencia had called her. As for Valencia, she wandered away into the conservatory, and stood looking, with a darkly brooding face, at the August moon sailing up the starlit sky.

"What can it mean—what can it mean?" a voice in her brain seemed beating out the words as with a hammer. "What mystery is this? How did papa obtain this diamond bracelet, and why did he insist so strongly upon my wearing it to-night? Does it belong to Madame Varneck? How should she know of the secret spring, the miniature, and the initials, else? And Mrs. Gilbert Varneck—why should she grow as white as a dead woman at sight of it? Did it really belong to my mother—that mysterious mother I have never known? Oh, me! what a miserable labyrinth of mystery and secrecy and darkness I grope in!"

She leaned, with a heavy sigh, against a marble column, the moon rays flashing back from the glittering jewels on her arm. At the moment, a step behind her made her start and look around. Lord Annesley stood in the door-way, a cigar between his fingers, the tired look more palpable than ever on his face—grandmamma's ball was boring him already.

"I beg your pardon," he said, catching sight of the girlish figure in shimmering silk. "I fancied the conservatory was deserted at this early hour, and came hither for a stolen smoke. Pray do not let me disturb you. I will— Is it possible? Miss Dandin!"

He caught sight of her face for the first time, and started eagerly forward, his brown eyes lighting up.

"I had no idea it was you. I thought you had not come down. Pray, pray, Miss Dandin, do not let me drive you away."

"You do not," she said, coldly, turning to go. "I was about to return to the drawing-room. Lord Annesley is free to smoke in peace—I have lingered here too long."

"Yes," he said, bitterly, "too long, since I have found you. If I were plague-stricken, Miss Dandin, you could hardly avoid me more persistently."

She made no reply; she moved, in cold silence, to the door.

"Is it your Spanish blood, Miss Dandin, makes you such a bitter, implacable foe? Is my error of the past beyond all forgiveness—beyond all atonement? Are the words I spoke at Homburg to make you hate me forever?"

"I hate no one. Allow me to pass, my lord."

"No," he said, setting his teeth; "not one step, Valencia Dandin, until you hear me! Since the hour we first met in this house you have given me no opportunity of setting myself right—of repairing my error. Now you *shall* listen."

She drew herself up to her full height, and stood looking him full in the face with eyes that outflashed her diamonds.

"Your error? You put it mildly, my lord. Your error is beyond reparation. I told you that night, two years ago, and I tell you now, I will never forgive you—never!"

He broke into a bitter laugh.

"You are right, since my sin is the same. I told you that night I loved you. I tell you to-night the same. I love you, Valencia Dandin, with my whole heart; and scorn me as you will, you love me, and you know it."

She grew ghastly white; her hand clinched convulsively. She almost gasped in her passion.

"You coward—you mean, mean, mean coward! Oh! if I only had a pistol to lay this wretch dead at my feet!"

"Valencia!" His voice changed to one of unutterable love; he made a step toward her. "Hear me! You madden me with your beauty; you are the most glorious creature my eyes ever saw. How can I help loving you—adoring you? Valencia what is all the world compared with you? I will resign the world for your sake. Forget the past—pardon my madness—and be my wife!"

"Your wife!" She repeated the words with unutterable scorn. "This is madness, surely. You will come to your senses to-morrow, my lord, and laugh at your folly. At

Homburg I was low enough to be told you loved me, but not high enough to be made your wife. Captain Dandin's daughter should have thought herself honored, no doubt, by your lordly love; but, unfortunately, she has peculiar notions on these points, and was absurd enough to consider the avowal an insult. I had led a vagabondish sort of life, no doubt, and the gaming-tables of Homburg were hardly the places to look for the future Lady Annesley; but no man alive had ever insulted me in that manner before. I scorned you and your love then. I spurn you and your offer now. You came to America to woo and win an heiress. Woo and win her. She is a thousand times too good for you; but she will have my best wishes for her happiness on her wedding-day. You I will never forgive. I love you, do I? You do well to taunt me with that. You could hardly take a surer means to make me hate you. I would tear my heart out if I thought there was one spark of love in it for so cowardly a dastard as you! Let me pass, my lord. If you detain me here another second, I will never speak one word to you as long as I live!"

She was white as death, her eyes blazing with fury. He, scarcely less white, stood aside, and she swept past him as an insulted and outraged empress might pass the veriest slave that crouched at her chariot wheels.

Half an hour passed, an hour, and Lord Annesley lingered in the conservatory. He stood, leaning where she had leaned, gazing out at the placid beauty of the night. His face had resumed its calm; only an added pallor told of the storm that had passed.

"She is right," he said, between his set teeth, "and I will take her at her word. I came to woo and win an heiress, and the heiress shall be wooed to-night, and won, if I have the power to win her. Let my mad dream go. The captain's daughter gave me my *coup de congé* to-night, if ever woman gave it."

He turned on his heel and quitted the conservatory. The ball was at its height; dancing was going on right and left.

At the head of one quadrille he saw Miss Dandin with a young Marylander, listening smilingly to what he was saying. He looked away again directly, and saw Miss Varneck, just sinking into a seat, flushed and fatigued.

"Now is my time," he thought—"now or never—a bold stroke for an heiress!"

He crossed to where she sat, and bent above her. Eudora received him with her brightest smile.

"Where in the world have you been, my lord? And in

such demand as you are, too! Look!" She held up her ivory tablets. "Three days ago you asked me for the first waltz."

"I have come to claim it; but, as its turn has not yet arrived, and as you look warm, permit me to lead you out on the veranda for a few moments. You need no wrap; the night is delightful."

She arose at once and took his arm, no suspicion of the truth dawning upon her.

They passed out on the veranda, and stood there under the light of the white August moon.

"How lovely it is! So still, so bright! Who would exchange this for the glare of the ball-room?"

"Yes," he said, "it is lovely." He was looking at the fresh, innocent, youthful face as he spoke. "I, for one, could stay here forever."

Something in his tone made her look up. The look in his face could not be mistaken. The girl's heart gave one great bound, then seemed to stand still.

"Miss Varneck," he said, slowly, steadily, "before I ever came here I heard of you. What I heard made me wish to see you. I came. I found they had not done you the poorest justice—you were lovelier than my most sanguine dreams. Eudora, I admire and esteem you with all my heart. Will you do me the honor to become my wife?"

Coldly, formally, stiffly the words came. Oh, Launcelot! Her heart went back with a bound to the old-fashioned garden, far away, where she had first heard passionate words of love. How different that love-making was from this!

"It will be the aim of my life to make you happy," he said, "and in the future the coronet of a countess shall grace this fair brow. Tell me, Eudora," he bent above her until his dark hair swept her cheek, "tell me I may hope."

She did not reply. She hid her glowing face in both hands and turned away.

"Am I to take this for an answer?" he said, gently, in that deep, melodious voice of his. "Has my little Eudora no place in her heart for me?"

"My lord! my lord!" she said, with something that was almost a sob, "I never thought—I never dreamed— Oh, I don't know what to say!"

"Let me give you time," still bending over her almost fondly. "I don't want to hurry or distress my dear little girl. I will wait until to-morrow, and my little cousin will tell me then."

"Yes," she said, catching eagerly at the reprieve, "wait until to-morrow. I—I don't want to be ungracious, my lord, but this is so—so sudden."

"Shall I take you back to the ball-room?" he asked, after a little pause.

His heart had not quickened its beating one throb, but hers was plunging tumultuously under her crêpe and pearls.

"Yes—no. Do you return, Lord Annesley, and I will remain here a few moments. No one will miss me. Pray go."

"As you will." He lifted her hand to his lips. "Dear little hand!" he said. "Give it to me, Eudora, and it shall be my priceless treasure through life."

He was gone; Eudora was alone, in the light of the solemn stars. For the first time she looked up. Only the high, bright, midnight moon was there to see her virginal blushes now.

Something more. What was that crashing through the underbrush and standing before her, in the brilliant moonlight—a tall, dark ghost?

There, with his reproachful face and haunting eyes turned full upon her—there, plain in the moonlight—stood before her the man she loved—Launcelot Lauriston.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CAPTAIN'S GHOST STORY.

EUDORA VARNECK stood spell-bound, paralyzed, utterly unable to speak or move. And there, still and upright in the moonlight, Launcelot Lauriston stood before her—only for one instant; then the tall, dark figure wheeled around and vanished amid the trees.

Had she seen him? Was it her lover in the flesh, or his ghost? Was the impetuous lover she had discarded dead, and was this his reproachful wraith?

Dizzily she staggered back and caught at the wall to keep from falling. The ground seemed heaving beneath her, the starry sky spinning round.

She staggered blindly through the open window into the drawing-room, and sunk, in a fainting state, into the nearest chair.

And the ball went on. Music and merriment resounded, and the daughter of the house was not missed.

It was ever-watchful grandmamma who discovered her absence first. She was not in any of the rooms; no one had seen her for over half an hour. Where could she be? She stopped

Miss Dandin, leaning on the arm of a stricken admirer, to ask the question.

"Eudora? I am sure I do not know. I have not seen her for ever so long. She must be in one of the rooms."

"Perhaps Lord Annesley can tell you, madame," suggested Valencia's cavalier. "The last time I saw Miss Varneck she was passing through the drawing-room, on his lordship's arm."

"Oh, indeed!" said grandmamma, a light breaking upon her. "Thanks, Mr. Hammond. I see his lordship over yonder."

She crossed at once to where Lord Annesley stood. He was leaning, in his weary way, against a vine-wreathed column, looking listlessly at the dancers.

"Where is Eudora, Clarence?" madame asked, a little sharply. "What have you done with her? She is not to be found."

Lord Annesley started up.

"No?" he said. "Then, perhaps, she has not come in yet. How very imprudent to remain there so long!"

"Where? Surely the child has not been out?"

"Only out on the veranda, madame. I left her there, by her own desire, about half an hour ago. I will go at once and find her."

He started on his errand with a guilty sense of how completely he had forgotten the poor little heiress. He had been watching that dark enchantress, the captain's daughter, in spite of himself, and he had forgotten there was another woman under the sun.

Madame kept close beside him. As they approached the window they saw a little white figure crouched in a heap, in a huge arm-chair, in a strange, distorted attitude of pain. The bright head lay bowed upon the gilded arm of the chair, the little figure lay motionless.

Grandmamma uttered a shrill cry.

"The child has fainted!" she said, darting forward.

"Eudora, my love—my pet!"

Eudora had not fainted. At the sharp cry she slowly raised her head, and showed them a pallid face and burning blue eyes.

"My darling, what is it? What is the matter?" grandmamma exclaimed. "Are you ill?"

The girl rose, with a heavy, hopeless sigh. She saw Lord Annesley gazing at her in consternation, and it aroused her as nothing else could have done.

"Yes," she said, drearily; "I am ill, grandmamma—sick, sick to the heart. Oh, take me to my own room, and let me get away from this dreadful glaring light, and that horrible, horrible music!"

Her voice choked in a dry, hysterical sob. She clung to grandmamma like the veriest child.

Mme. Varneck and her titled kinsman looked at each other in speechless consternation.

"What on earth is it? Do you understand this, my lord? Eudora, my dear, tell grandmamma what has happened to distress you?"

"Nothing," she said, with a second sob—"nothing you would understand—only I am tired and sick, grandmamma, and I want to go to my room."

"My dear, you shall—you are ill and hysterical, that is plain. Clarence, say nothing of this; I do not wish our guests disturbed. I will accompany my granddaughter to her chamber, and leave her in charge of her maid."

Lord Annesley bowed, wondering and distressed. Could what he had said be the cause of all this? Young ladies, as a general thing, do not fall into agonized hysterics upon receiving a proposal; but, then, no two young ladies are alike.

He stood aside, and saw madame lead tenderly away the little, clinging heiress.

"Odd!" thought his lordship, puzzled intensely. "I propose to two young ladies to-night, and one flies into a passion, and the other falls into hysterics. I am afraid my unlucky star is in the ascendant. I shall have to give up the business, I fear."

Grandmamma returned presently without her granddaughter. Eudora was lying down, she said. All she required was rest and solitude.

And Lord Annesley wandered away again to look languidly at the dancers, and see Valencia Dandin, the brilliant beauty of the ball.

The little heiress, of course, was speedily missed, and inquiry made. Madame met them all with a placid front.

The poor child had been seized with so violent a headache that she had been obliged to go to her room and lie down for awhile. It was the heat and the noise and the unwonted excitement, no doubt. No one was to disturb himself—she would return presently.

But Eudora did not return. The headache proved to be obdurate, and the ball ended, and the pretty heiress did not reappear.

It was very hard Miss Varneck, of all people, should lose grandmamma's brilliant ball, so every one said.

The gray dawn of the summer morning crept palely over the Maryland hills; a new day arose; the guests were gone, and Glen Gower was at peace once more.

Still wearing her satin robes, madame sought her granddaughter's chamber before retiring to her room. She found Eudora lying quietly, her eyes closed, very pale, very still.

"She is asleep," madame thought, tenderly.

She kissed the colorless cheek, blew out the night-lamp, and stole softly away.

But Eudora was not asleep. Should she ever sleep again? She had seen her lover's ghost—Launcelot Lauriston was dead.

That was the thought that, in the still watches of that most miserable night, had fixed itself on her mind as firmly as her own existence.

He was dead, and his spirit had arisen before her in the solemn midnight—in the mystic light of the moon—pale, reproachful. He was dead, and the world was at an end for her. Twice, at the risk of his own, he had saved her life. He had loved her with his whole impetuous heart, and this had been his reward. He was dead, and what was there left for her in the wide world but to die, too?

"I am so young and so strong," she thought, with a dreary sigh, "and life is so long. Oh, Launcelot, Launcelot! And I loved you so dearly—so dearly!"

And then the tears came—the blessed tears that keep youthful hearts from breaking. Lying there, she wept long and bitterly, until she could weep no longer.

She forgot Lord Annesley—she forgot all the world. How could she remember anything, save that the man she loved was dead, and that his pallid ghost had arisen in the solemn moonlight to reproach her?

So, while music and dancing and revelry went on below, the heiress of Glen Gower lay buried amid her pillows, with a sore—sore heart.

The afternoon shadows lay long and cool on the grass before any of the tired family quitted their rooms. Madame was one of the first to descend, and she found Lord Annesley pacing to and fro on the veranda, his eternal cigar in his mouth. He flung it away at sight of her, and came eagerly forward.

"I have been miserably restless and anxious," he said, after the first greetings were past. "I take all the blame of

Miss Varneck's illness on myself. It must have been what I said to her last night that wrought the change. She was certainly well enough before."

"What you said?" madame repeated.

"I asked your granddaughter to be my wife, madame."

"And she—what did she say?"

"She gave me no answer. She looked confused, startled. She begged me to leave her, to give her until to-day, and I returned to the house. The next time I saw her was with you."

"And you think your declaration produced the hysteria? Clearly impossible, my lord. Eudora is of an excitable temperament, but there was nothing in that to distress or alarm her. On the contrary, she must have felt—as we all do—highly flattered."

Lord Annesley bowed gravely.

"Thank you, madame. I fear, however, that my abrupt declaration was the cause. Will you kindly tell her from me that I would be the last person alive to annoy or distress her willingly? Tell her, if I have been hasty or presumptuous, I beg her pardon, and that, if she wishes it, I withdraw at once all pretensions to her hand. Let her forget the past, as I will endeavor to do, and let us be simply friends and cousins once more."

"I will deliver your message, Lord Annesley. If, however, it should turn out to be otherwise—if your surmise proves incorrect, as I am certain it will—what then?"

"In that case I will still hope. It is my most ardent wish to win my fair kinswoman's regard."

"No very hard matter, I should think," madame said, smiling graciously. "I am going to Eudora's room now, Clarence. In an hour you will find me here again, and you shall know your fate."

She turned away. Lord Annesley calmly lighted a cigar.

"My fate!" he thought. "Yes, it is surely fate, hurrying me on whither it listeth. We drift down the stream as the current wills, and our puny efforts to reach the banks on either side are futile as a babe's grasp. If I marry Eudora Varneck, I will be true to her in thought and deed; I will tear this dark sorceress out of my heart, though I should pluck that heart itself, in the effort, out by the roots."

Eudora was alone in her chamber when grandmamma entered. She sat by the window, her white dressing-gown falling loosely around her—her face as colorless as her robe.

The little hands lay idly in her lap—the sad, hopeless eyes went wandering drearily over the ceaseless sea.

“Up, my pet?” grandmamma said, kissing her—she was very fond of her pretty, gentle Eudora, whatever doubt and distrust she might feel for her mother—“and better, I hope.”

“I don’t know,” Eudora replied, wearily; “my head aches, I think, and I feel—oh, grandmamma! I feel as though I should like to lie down and die!”

At that despairing cry of girlish distress, Mme. Varneck stood aghast.

“My dear, lie down and die! My love, what on earth is the matter? Something surely happened last night. Will my pet not tell grandmamma?”

“I can’t. Oh, please, don’t ask me. It is beyond your power to help—beyond mortal power, now. Oh, grandmamma, I think I am the wickedest and most miserable girl alive.”

“My dear child!” grandmamma could just gasp, in her consternation, “do you know what dreadful things you are saying? You are not growing crazy, I hope?”

“No, grandmamma. I have not even that chance of forgetfulness. I am not crazy—I know what I say. Oh, I have been a wicked, wicked, heartless wretch!”

“Come, Eudora,” exclaimed madame, resolutely, “enough of this. I won’t hear my granddaughter—Miss Varneck, of Glen Gower—maligned in this shocking manner. You never committed a murder, did you?”

But the smile she had hoped to extort did not come. Miss Varneck covered her poor, pale face with both hands and sobbed convulsively.

“Yes—yes—yes! that is the name for it. I murdered him as surely as though I had plunged a dagger into his heart. Oh, will I ever be forgiven in this world or the next?”

“Good heavens!” cried Mme. Varneck, at the end of her patience, “who is the infatuated child speaking of? Eudora, you don’t mean Lord Annesley?”

“Lord Annesley!”

She dropped her hands, and sat looking at the elder lady with a face so blank that it needed no words to tell how completely she had forgotten him.

“Yes, Lord Annesley, you ridiculous child! Did he not ask you to be his wife last night?”

Eudora passed her hands helplessly across her forehead.

“I had forgotten that,” she said, in a dazed sort of way.

“Yes, he asked me.”

"You have taken leave of your senses, I think," said madame, sharply. "He asked you, and you have forgotten? Really? Pray, Miss Varneck, what reply did you make? Perhaps you have forgotten that also."

"Yes—no. I told him to go away, and he went."

"Upon my word, you take state upon yourself, my little heiress. Rather cavalier fashion to treat a live lord. Did you not tell him he should have his answer to-day?"

"Did I? Oh, yes! Has he been telling you, grandma?"

"Yes, Miss Varneck; he has been telling me; and, what is more, he is nearly distracted at the incomprehensible state you are in. He thinks his declaration caused it."

"His? Oh, no, no, no! I never thought of him. Tell him so, grandmamma. Don't let him distress himself on my account. He had nothing to do with it."

"I thought as much. I have told him so already. And now, Eudora, leave off your mysteries and speak out plainly. I insist upon knowing what happened after he left you on the veranda last night."

"Grandmamma, don't—don't! Have a little pity on your poor Eudora!"

"It is because I pity even her imaginary distress so much—because I love my little Eudora so dearly—that I insist. Tell me what it was. You may as well. I will not leave you until you do."

One glance at the determined old face showed helpless Eudora she would keep her word. With a heavy, heavy sigh, she dropped her fair head on the broad, maternal breast.

"Grandmamma, I—oh, how shall I tell you?—I saw the spirit of—of a person who is dead, last night!"

At this most unexpected revelation, Mme. Varneck sat perfectly thunder-struck. Of all the confessions she had looked for, this was certainly the last.

"You—saw—a spirit?" she repeated, gaspingly. "Eudora Varneck, you never mean to tell me you saw a ghost?"

"Yes, grandmamma."

"Now grant me patience! You absurd, ridiculous child! Are you not ashamed to sit here and talk such nonsense as this?"

"It is not nonsense!" the indignant tears beginning to flow. "I saw him in the moonlight, as plainly as ever I saw him in my life. And he is dead, and it was his spirit, and I—Oh, dear, dear, dear!"

The raining tears, the irrepressible sobs, were nothing to be laughed at. Absurd as it might be to lookers-on, the childish

distress was none the less real and bitter. Grandmamma was too kind-hearted not to be touched. She took the poor little girl in her arms and hushed the sobs on her breast.

"My dear—my dear, don't cry! Grandma would be the last in the world to distress her pet. Don't cry so bitterly! Tell me whose spirit it was?"

"No, no! I can not! Don't ask me, grandmamma—don't, don't!"

"Well, my dear, I won't. We won't speak of it at all. Let us talk of something else—Lord Annesley, for instance. You promised him his answer to-day. He loves my foolish little girl very dearly. He will make her the best husband in the world. She must marry some time. Why not marry this prospective earl?"

The sobs ceased suddenly. Not that Eudora was dazzled now by the prospective earldom. She was thinking of madame's last words, "You must marry some time." Must she? And she had hoped to live and die Eudora Varneck.

"We all like him—your papa and I. He is everything the most romantic girl could wish—young, handsome, elegant, high-bred, and a nobleman. You don't care for anybody else. He will make you happy, I know. Say 'yes,' Eudora, and make him happy, too."

There was a pause. The sobbing had quite ceased. Eudora lay very still.

"My little girl doesn't care for any one else, I know," grandmamma said, gently.

"No, grandmamma," very, very mournfully, "for no one alive now. But—"

"What, my own? You don't dislike our handsome Clarence?"

"No, grandmamma. How could I? I like him—I like him very much; but I don't—no, I don't love him!"

"My pet, you will love him dearly before a month. No one could help it. I may tell him, then, Eudora says 'yes'?"

"Oh, grandmamma! I don't know—I don't know! Oh, what shall I do? Grandmamma!"—suddenly, impetuously—"would it make you happy—would it make papa happy if I said yes?"

"Very happy, my dear Eudora! Happier than happy!"

The tears came again—more gently this time, but flowing fast.

"And you have been so good to me—so very good! You have done so much for me! Dear grandmamma—dear, best grandmamma that ever was in this world!—I will do what-

ever you say—whatever you think right. I will marry Lord Annesley if you wish it.”

“That is my good little granddaughter! I knew you would! Oh, you will be as happy as the day is long, and the envy of all the girls in Maryland. Now, dry your tears, my own, and compose yourself, while I go and make him blessed with the joyful news. You will come down by and by, will you not?”

“Not to-day, I think. Give me until to-morrow. Leave me alone until then, grandmamma, and I will do better.”

“And you won’t—you won’t see any more ghosts if you can help it? Had you not better keep your maid with you, or your friend Miss Dandin?”

“No, no!” poor Eudora said, mournfully. “I want to be alone. I am not afraid of anything. To-morrow I will be quite well again.”

“Then, for the present,” stooping and kissing her, “my fair, future Lady Annesley, good-bye!”

She left the room; and Eudora, covering her face with her hands, tried to shut out the whole mournful world.

“Forgive me, Launcelot!” her heart cried. “You are gone, my best beloved, and what does it matter what becomes of me? Oh, let me make some one happy before I die! I have made misery enough already!”

Madame found her kinsman lounging idly on the veranda, looking with lazy brown eyes at the sunlit prospect of meadow and woodland.

“What did I tell you?” said madame, tapping him briskly on the arm. “You had nothing to do with Eudora’s indisposition. The silly child got a fright after you left her. She thinks—you will hardly credit it—she thinks she saw a ghost!”

“A ghost!”

“Yes—incredible, isn’t it? A tree in the moonlight, a shadow on the grass—who knows what? But it frightened her sorely. You will not see her until to-morrow, but she sends her answer by me.”

Lord Annesley looked at her. The answer was written very plainly in madame’s smiling face.

“It is yes, of course. She told me in the prettiest, shyest way how much she liked you. Permit me to offer you my congratulations, my lord. It has been the dearest wish of my heart.”

He held out his hand—very pale, very grave.

“It will be the aim of my life to make her happy,” he said. “She is worthy a better man than I.”

"Of course; but the 'better man' is so hard to find. And now I must go and superintend my household matters. By the way, are none of our lazy people up yet?"

"Colonel Varneck has gone for a constitutional. Captain Dandin has ridden away to Baltimore. The ladies have not yet appeared. Here comes the colonel back—I will join him."

"And tell him the good news," said madame, turning into the house. "He will be as pleased as I am."

The whole family met at dinner, with the exception of Eudora and Captain Dandin. The young lady still kept her chamber; the gentleman had not returned from the city. He had gone to see if his Silver Shore protégées had yet arrived, and this time he found them safely established with Dr. Brithwood. His visit was a short one. Launcelot was moody and silent, not to say sulky, and Mrs. Lauriston was, of course, distressed.

"I really think he was at Glen Gower last night," she said, confidentially. "He was absent until long after midnight, and returned as you see him, gloomy and dejected. He may have caught sight of Miss Varneck."

"Foolish boy!" the captain answered; "but we will cure him of his folly, dear lady, ere long. A prettier girl shall come, and he will forget the flirting little heiress."

It was late when the captain reached the house, and just in time to escape a summer hurricane. Lightning and thunder and rain and wind made the sultry summer night terrible.

"A wild night, my fate!" Captain Dandin said, entering the drawing-room, where all save Eudora were. "I have just escaped with dry bones—no more."

"A fitter night for Eudora's ghost than last night," remarked the colonel, with a careless laugh.

They had been discussing the strange story of the girl's fright and subsequent illness.

"Eh?" said the captain, sharply, "what did you say? Miss Varneck's ghost?"

"Oh, Eudora thinks she saw an apparition last night in the moonlight, and the fancy has made her ill. Girls will be silly, but this last is the climax of silliness."

It broke upon the captain like a flash.

"Whose ghost?" he asked. "Does she say?"

"No—does she, madame? That part she persists in keeping secret. It is a gentleman's ghost, however."

"Gilbert, for shame!" his mother cried. "It is no jesting matter. The poor child is really ill with terror. I never dreamed she was so imaginative."

"It may not be imagination," said the captain, coolly. "Perhaps she did see—what she says."

Everybody stared. Captain Dandin took a seat, and met their regards coolly.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the colonel, "here's Dandin going to set up for a believer in ghosts—Dandin, who doesn't believe in spirits of any kind—celestial or diabolical."

"How do you know I don't? Some of the latter I have been personally acquainted with. As for ghosts—well, I never saw a *bond-fide* ghost myself, but I once saw a person who did."

"Of course," said the colonel; "always the way. No one has ever seen a ghost himself, but he always knows a person who has. What was your spook like? Supernaturally tall, and robed in a white sheet, or clad in armor and rattling in chains, like the Castle Specter? Tell us about it, Dandin—it's just the night for a ghost story. Lightning flashing, thunder crashing, rain falling, wind brawling, and everybody listening with hair bristling! Fire away!"

Captain Dandin looked about him with a smile, not evoked, however, by the colonel's extempore doggerel. His sinister glance and smile rested, last of all, upon Gilbert Varneck's wife.

She had drawn suddenly a little apart from the rest, and sat very still, her face hidden by a fanciful little hand-screen.

"The story I am going to tell you is true, messieurs and mesdames, ghost story though it be. I have it from the lady herself. It begins in a very old way. An infatuated girl, mad with love—a false young man—desertion—despair—desperation. And it ends in a way not altogether new: the lady murders the gentleman."

"You said just now you had the story from the lady herself," observed the colonel. "Does your visiting list embrace a few murderesses, my dear Dandin?"

"I happened to know this one, at least. The lady slipped through the fingers of Justice; time healed her wounds and hid her secret. She married a husband—let me see—some ten years after. The mad passion of her youth had long before burned itself out. She loved the poor fool she had duped into marrying her better than she had ever loved her first lover. She had almost forgotten the dead man and her hidden crime, until one moonlight night, as she stood in her husband's garden, the dead man rose and appeared before her—"

"By George!" interrupted Colonel Varneck.

"She had not been thinking of him. It was no optical

illusion—no fancy of a feverish and distempered brain. Yes, there he stood before her, as plain as she ever saw him in life!”

“The lady fainted, of course?” said the colonel.

“She fainted—yes; but when she recovered she had sufficient presence of mind to keep her horrible secret to herself. She saw the specter again—once or twice, I am not sure which. Each time she was quite alone, each time in the same place, each time when she least expected it. The man she had shot rose before her precisely as she had seen him in life—an avenging ghost. The crime she had hidden from man wrought its own atonement.”

“I am glad Eudora is not here to listen to your raw-head-and-bloody-bones story, Captain Dandin,” said Mme. Varneck, a little impatiently. “Did the lady take you into her confidence, from which the rest of the world was excluded?”

The captain’s sinister smile was at its brightest. His gleaming black eyes were fixed with a lurid fire upon Eleanor Varneck.

“Pardon me, madame; I keep my secrets. I knew the murdered man well; he was my particular friend. His name was Gerald Rosslyn. The name of the woman who shot him down in cold blood—the murderess—was—”

There was a horrible pause. The blaze of the lightning filled the room; the thunder broke above their heads as though the heavens were rending in twain. No one knew why, but all held their breath in expectation.

The captain spoke again:

“How it lightnings! how it thunders! Will it be worse on the Judgment Day, I wonder, and how will it fare with murderesses then? I don’t think I’ll mention the name of my murderess to-night. She still lives, and is a most respectable and estimable lady, moving in the very best society. Who knows? You may meet her one day, Madame Varneck, and you will feel more comfortable as you brush skirts not to know that she once shot a man. ‘Where ignorance is bliss,’ etc. Hah! look there! I fear your wife, colonel, is not very well.”

The hand-screen had dropped, her head had fallen back, her face was livid. Sitting there quietly, without moan or cry, Gilbert Varneck’s wife had fainted entirely away.

CHAPTER XII.

FACING THE WORST.

ELEANOR VARNECK sat alone in her room, the door locked, the world shut out. The sunshine of a brilliant morning flooded the apartment, and set the golden canaries in their gilded cages mad with joy.

The lightning and thunder and rain had passed with the night—all without was sunshine and peace; but a night of blackest despair reigned in Eleanor Varneck's soul—must reign there for evermore.

"My sin has found me out," she thought—"the day of my doom has come! Retribution has come to me! Truly, 'the way of the transgressor is hard.'"

She thought it with a sort of sullen despair. She sat very still, her hands clasped upon her lap, her darkly brooding face never moving in its fixed, stony calm.

The worst anguish was past—the first fierce pangs of torture that had followed her recovery from that fainting fit were over. Dark, sullen despair had come in their place, and she sat there in tearless, hopeless calm. She knew the worst now—she knew her fate was upon her—all she had dreaded most was at hand.

Already she was suspected—she could see it in Mme. Varneck's averted face, in her husband's troubled eyes—not of the horrible, unnatural truth, but of something vague and terrible—something that had cast her out already from their confidence and love, that had rendered her an outcast in the place she had usurped.

"All is gone," she thought—"wealth, position, and my husband's love! That is the bitterest blow of all! Whatever I was, whatever I am, I love him—my adored husband!—as no one will ever love him again in this world! For his sake I would have been the truest, tenderest wife, the most devoted mother, the most obedient daughter to that proud old woman. I would have become pure, and womanly, and good. But all that is passed. I have sinned, and my sin has found me out. There is nothing left now but to 'cover my face and die with dignity.'"

Her glazed eyes never left the tinted walls, her rigid face never altered while she thought this. All power to feel and suffer was numbed and dead within her. She had endured a

life-time of fiercest agony in the past night. Come what might, she could never suffer like that again.

The morning wore on. The September sunlight lay in squares of glory upon the carpet, and lighted up the wretched woman's haggard face. She sat, all unconscious of the passage of time, lost in the depth of her supreme misery.

"How long will he give me?" she wondered. "How long before I am branded as a usurper and a murderess to all the world? Not long, I know; but long enough to finish my career of crime—long enough to be even with you, Captain Dandin!"

She rose up suddenly, her dull black eyes lighting fiercely, and crossed the room. An old, time-beaten trunk that had accompanied her when she first came to Glen Gower stood hidden away in a closet, securely locked and strapped. She drew it forth, knelt down, unstrapped it, took a key from around her neck, and turned it sharply in the lock.

She threw back the lid. There was nothing within but old garments—dingy black dresses and shawls and mantles that had been hers in the days of her poverty and toil.

Yes, something else, hidden from sight beneath all. She drew out something that glittered in the sunshine—a pistol!

Gilbert Varneck's wicked wife held it up to the light and looked at it long and earnestly, the dusky light in her eyes deepening and deepening.

The pistol was rusted and tarnished with time and disuse. Slowly a dark, deadly smile crept over her haggard face.

"You did me good service once, my friend," she said, "when you shot down in his bridal hour Gerald Rosslyn. You shall do me good service once again, before the tragic story of my life ends, when you shoot down, like a mad dog, Gerald Rosslyn's friend, Captain Dandin!"

She thrust the trunk back in its place, closed the closet, took a seat by the window, and began diligently rubbing away at the rusted spots upon the little weapon.

"You deserve to shine brightly," she said, speaking to the deadly toy, that creeping smile still dark on her face, "for the service you have done—for the service you will do. To-day for you, Captain Dandin; to-morrow for me. The worm you have trodden on for eight long years will turn in its dying struggles. Do your worst; I am ready to meet the doom I can not avoid. Do your worst, and I will do mine. We will cry quits, I think, in our dying hour, my deadly enemy!"

She worked on. The smile faded away; her face settled into marble rigidity. Earthly hope had gone; she had set

herself resolutely to meet her doom. Do what he might, Captain Dandin could never make her fear him again as she had feared him.

"I can do as the Indians do," she thought, with strange, dull calm—"go to the stake and suffer the torture without a groan. 'Come what will, I have been blessed.' Yes, for eight years I have been unutterably happy. The man I love, I worship, has been mine—all my own. When I lose him it matters little how soon death comes. I don't think there can be worse torture in the other world than I have suffered already here."

A shadow passing darkened the sunshine. She looked up and saw Captain Dandin lounging down toward the shore, smoking a cigar.

He looked up, met her eye, raised his hat with a brilliant smile, and was about to pass on.

She stopped him by a sign, and threw open the window.

"One moment, Captain Dandin," she said, in a clear voice. "I wish to speak with you."

"At madame's service. I trust I see you better, Mrs. Gilbert Varneck. My faith! but you frightened us all by your sudden fainting fit last night."

"Are you going to the shore?" she asked, steadily.

"If you wish it, most certainly. Where would I not go to please my fairest Adelia? Does the name sound oddly? One hears it so seldom."

"Go down to the shore," she said, in the same steady voice, "and wait for me. The time has come, Captain Dandin, for us to understand each other. I will join you in fifteen minutes."

He made her a flourishing bow and turned to go, his diabolical smile at its brightest.

"Mrs. Gilbert Varneck has but to speak to be obeyed by the most devoted of her slaves. I will await you there, fairest Adelia."

She closed the window, hid the pistol in the pocket of her dress, and rose. A dark, heavy shawl hung in the wardrobe. She threw it over her head and around her, opened the door, and went out.

She met no one—she was past caring if she had. All the minor matters of life had sunk into insignificance now. She went through a side door into the grounds, and flitted away under the waving trees, where the birds sung jubilantly, down to the sea-shore.

Captain Dandin leaned against a rock, smoking while he

waited, and lazily watching the monotonous wash of the waves. No living thing but themselves was to be seen—the long sandy shore was entirely deserted.

The captain started up and threw his cigar into the water as she drew near. His evil smile still lighted his ugly face as he turned to meet her. Hers was fixed as death.

For an instant they stood looking full in each other's eyes. In that supreme moment neither quailed. She had passed beyond earthly fear—her doom was fixed as eternity itself—she would face it, and defy him to the death.

“My faith!” cried the captain, with a soft laugh, “but the world has changed in a night! You have got quite a new way of looking, my lady.”

“What did you mean,” she asked, quietly, “by telling my story to all these people?”

“And we take it like that! So cool, so placid, so sweetly! Fairest Adelia, I meant that the eight years had expired—that our compact was at an end—that Dandin was free.”

“You are going to tell all?”

“You have said it, fairest lady. I am going to tell all!”

There was a pause. She broke it first—voice nor face never changing.

“What have I ever done to you,” she said, “that you should hate and hunt me down like this?”

Captain Dandin laughed.

“Hate you? Now what an ugly word that is! Did you not give me five thousand dollars? Did you not present me with the ancestral diamonds? Have you not paid the stipulated yearly sum like a lady of honor? Why, then, talk of hate? Dandin admires the beautiful Adelia beyond all her sex. No, no; it is not hate. It is ‘justice, though the heavens fall.’ ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life.’ The shedder of blood, by man shall be slain. Gerald Rosslyn was murdered more foully than man was ever murdered before. Gerald Rosslyn’s murderess is also my friend; but for that murderess the rope and the gallows wait, and Jules Dandin will go to the scaffold to see her hung!”

Mrs. Gilbert Varneck never flinched. The slow, deathly smile that had dawned upon her face when she took out the pistol, dawned upon it again as she met the man’s sinister gaze.

“Yes,” she said, slowly, as though weighing his words, “it is so much better to understand each other. I understand you, Captain Dandin, thoroughly now. Would you not like to understand me a little, also?”

There was something so dark and deadly in her burning

black eyes, in her quiet, monotonous voice, that the villain absolutely recoiled.

"The devil!" he said, a glimpse of the savage within him flashing out involuntarily. "What do you mean?"

"Ah, I see!" still with that smile that made his flesh creep; "you are afraid, Captain Dandin. Well, you have reason to be. The veriest slave that ever crawled, when past hope, past help, past everything, will sometimes turn on his tyrant and tormentor. I don't threaten, but Captain Dandin is afraid of his victim."

He tried to laugh—his old, cynical laugh—but the effort was a miserable failure.

"My own Adelia, what will you do? Shoot me as you did Gerald Rosslyn?"

"You will see when the time comes. Why have you kept my secret for over eight years, to reveal it now?"

"Do you need to ask? To make my revenge the sweeter, the more complete. Eight years ago you did not love your husband—or the man you claim as husband—as you love him now. Eight years ago you would not have felt his scorn, his loathing, his horror, as you will feel it now."

"The man I claim as husband is my husband," the woman said, unflinchingly. "No earthly power can undo that."

"Can it not?" he laughed aloud. "Why, poor fool, poor imbecile, he has never been your husband for one little hour!"

"I do not understand you," she said, slowly. "Why do you tell me lies? You saw us married yourself."

"Certainly, I saw you married; the clergyman was an orthodox clergyman; but, for all that, you are not, you have never been for one poor second, Gilbert Varneck's wife."

"And why?"

"Because—you idiot, you dupe!—the laws of this narrow-minded country prohibit a man from having two wives at one and the same time. Because, if he will persist in such folly, it declares the last marriage null and void."

"Still I don't comprehend," she said, with slow patience. "Gilbert Varneck has no wife living but me."

"But you?" He laughed aloud again. "Oh, infatuated Adelia! His wife lives—his lawful wife—the bride of his youth—the only woman he ever really loved—your sister Eleanor!"

She staggered back and stood looking at him. He had struck her dumb at last.

"Oh, fool, fool, fool!" he cried—"poor fool, from first to last! And you thought you could fathom the depth of Dan-

din's revenge—you, with your shallow woman's brain, your infatuated woman's heart! She lives, I tell you—a hundred times more beautiful than you. She lives, and her son—the image of his handsome father—lives, and will inherit Glen Gower when you and your wax-doll upstart are cast out and fugitive. Eleanor Varneck lives, and you—what you were in your mad girlhood, when you eloped with Gerald Rosslyn and became his toy of an hour, you have been for the past eight years with Gilbert Varneck. Ha! ha! my fair one You stand confounded at last. Who is victor now, my clever Adelia Lyon?"

She laid her hand upon her heart, the dull, leaden pallor of death creeping over her face for the first time.

"Is this true?" she asked.

"True as the heaven you will never see, my Adelia. Eleanor Varneck and her son live, and are in Baltimore. Before the September moon wanes she shall be in your place in Gilbert Varneck's arms."

She held out her hands with a sudden cry. That blow had gone straight to her heart.

"Oh, my God, have mercy! I thought she was dead. Tell me," she cried, turning upon him with sudden fury, "is it this Mrs. Lauriston of whom they speak?"

"It is."

"And Launcelot Lauriston, her son—Gilbert Varneck's son—is the man who saved my daughter's life?"

"Launcelot Lauriston is her son and Gilbert Varneck's son, certainly; but he never saved your daughter's life."

"What do you mean? Did he not twice save Eudora?"

"Undoubtedly. I mean, my poor, ridiculous Adelia, that the little Eudora is no daughter of yours."

"What!"

"Oh, poor, poor, poor imbecile! Fooled to the top of your bent—fooled even by an ignorant old woman. The girl Eudora is no child of yours. Even Granny Croak duped you. When you went to her for your child, that child was thousands of miles away, and the ignorant old woman of New Jersey took your money, and told you lies, and laughed in her sleeve, and gave you her grandchild."

"Her grandchild?"

"Yes—little Dora Dalton. I have the woman's dying deposition down in black and white. Even she could fool you. My clever Adelia, what do you think of your cleverness now?"

"Where, then, is my child?"

She spoke in a dull, thick voice. That leaden pallor still overspread her face.

“Do you really not guess? And they talk of the maternal instinct—those others. Carry your thoughts back, my Adelia. They are a little confused by this time, I fear. Carry your thoughts back to the night of the ball. Think of a diamond bracelet; think who that young lady most resembles; think of what she told madame—‘That bracelet had been given to Captain Dandin, by her mother, eight years before.’ Think of it, clever Adelia, and exert your wits.”

She uttered a second cry—came a step nearer to him.

“Man—man!” she exclaimed, “tell me the truth. Is she my daughter?”

“At last!” he said, with a quiet laugh, “my own Adelia knows all. The girl you call Valencia Dandin is the child you deserted in the backwoods of New Jersey, nineteen years ago—is your child and Gerald Rosslyn’s.”

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR THE THIRD TIME.

Two hours after Captain Dandin and his victim parted, that sunny September morning, Miss Eudora Varneck opened her chamber door and descended to luncheon.

Very, very pale, her sweet young face set in hopeless sadness very mournful to see, Eudora appeared among them.

She had dressed herself with scrupulous care. The bright auburn ringlets were freshly perfumed and curled. But, for all that, she looked like some wan spirit of the moonlight as she glided in their midst.

“I have promised, and I will keep my word,” she thought, mournfully, as she made that tasteful toilet. “Grandmamma shall not be disappointed. My life will not be very long. Let me try and make those who love me happy while it lasts.”

The family circle was complete this time. Even the noseless captain and his tortured victim were present.

The captain’s Mephistopheles smile was brighter than ever in this hour of his triumph, and his glib tongue ran unceasingly.

The woman who called herself Eleanor Varneck sat very still and calm, outwardly, and the rouge she wore hid somewhat the ghastly hue of her face; but no rouge that ever reddened the human face could alter the dumb despair that looked at you out of those haggard black eyes.

Gilbert Varneck watched her with a darkly troubled face,

and his mother was ominously silent and stern. She saw it with a painless, dull apathy that was the very depth of despair. What did it matter now? Her doom had come. This was only part of it. Very soon they would know what a miserable, guilty wretch their house held—very soon they would turn with horror from the human viper they had cherished so long.

Lord Annesley rose at Eudora's entrance and placed a seat for her by his side, with a grave, respectful bow. Every one knew how matters stood between them by this time, but there was very little of lover-like rapture in his quiet face, very little of virginal blushing timidity in hers. Her heart was far too sore, but the blue eyes looked up for an instant into his with a glance unutterably tender and sweet.

"I do not love you," that look said, "but I will make you happy if I can."

They were very silent—ominously silent. The shadow of what was coming so fast lay upon them all.

Captain Dandin was the only one who talked; but no one listened to Captain Dandin. Eleanor Varneck looked earnestly into the two girlish faces before her, and knew that her enemy had spoken the truth.

Eudora was not her child—some inward prescience had told her so from the first. This dark Valencia bore Gerald Rosslyn's lineaments, softened and beautified. This tall, dark girl, with the proud, still face and luminous black eyes, was her forsaken child—the child of the man whom she had murdered.

"*Mon Dieu!*" the captain cried, "how you all sit like mutes at a funeral—so solemn, so sad! What is it? My colonel, is it indigestion, or the weather, or what? Even Dandin will not be able to hold out much longer, if this chronic gloom sets in."

The colonel made some impatient reply, and rose. The others followed his example, and dispersed about the house.

Eudora and Valencia went out on the veranda, and Lord Annesley followed them.

"Who is for the city?" he said. "Eudora, you are whiter than your dress. A drive will do you good. Come."

She sighed and shrunk from him a little, but she would not refuse.

"Thank you, my lord. I shall like the drive, if—Valencia, you will come, too?"

"If you wish it."

"Yes, yes; I have some shopping to do, and the day is

lovely. Let us go and dress at once. My lord, we will be ready in half an hour."

"I will await you, then, with the pony-carriage."

The girls left the veranda and ascended to their rooms. Neither spoke by the way. Eudora was glad of the drive, so that it was not to be a *tête-à-tête* one with her accepted lover. As for Valencia—but she had inherited some of the captain's impassiveness—her thoughts were not to be read in her face.

On the upper landing she stopped Eudora suddenly, and took her impulsively in her arms.

"I said nothing down-stairs, but I know all. My darling, you will love him soon, and will be very happy. You have Valencia's best wishes."

She spoke hurriedly, kissed the pale, upturned face, turned abruptly, and vanished into her own room. Eudora looked after her a moment with those sad, sweet eyes.

"I will never love him as you do," she thought; "I will never suit him half as well. But I will do my best."

The pony-carriage, with his lordship for driver, was in waiting at the front door when the young ladies descended. Eudora sat beside her lover, but neither spoke of what had passed. It was scarcely likely, with Miss Dandin so near them. It was a very pleasant drive along the dusty high-road, tree-shaded most of the way, but a very silent one. They were at cross-purposes, those three, and they knew it.

"Have you anything to purchase, Valencia?" Eudora asked as they rattled into the city.

"Only some stationery," Valencia said, "and here is a store now. My lord, I will alight, if you please."

He drew up the carriage and assisted the captain's daughter to descend. As he was about to re-enter, Eudora spoke suddenly:

"My lord, pray do me the favor to step in and purchase the latest magazines. I suppose I am lazy, but I really don't want the trouble of getting out."

He smiled a little as he gave her the reins. He understood her perfectly. It was not laziness, but the dread of being alone with him.

"Are you quite sure you can hold the ponies? Remember, they are but half-tamed things at best, and be careful."

He turned and went after Miss Dandin into the store. Eudora took the reins carelessly enough, and held them loosely; but an instant after, with a frightened cry, she grasped them tight. With the whoop of Sioux Indians, there tore round the corner a yelling mob of boys, preceding the approach of a

steam fire-engine. The first yell was enough for the ponies. With a wild snort of terror, they jerked the reins out of the fragile hands that held them, and tore down the street like creatures gone mad.

The mob of boys left the steam-engine at once to follow the new excitement. Yells of "Stop 'em—stop 'em!" rang on all sides; but no one tried to stop them. The ponies were off like the wind—literally flying through thronged streets, clearing a passage wherever they went. One look had been enough for Eudora; then she sat perfectly still—stunned with terror. The phaeton must soon be dashed to pieces, and she with it. And she had thought only an hour ago that she wanted to die.

The ponies dashed round the corner of Lexington Street, and were half-way down before a savior appeared. A young man standing on the steps of a handsome residence, leisurely drawing on his gloves, saw the furious approach, and leaped down with one impetuous spring directly before them. An instant after he had grasped the reins, with the strength of a young giant, shouting lustily for help. It was an act of desperate daring. The infuriated animals tried to trample him down, but help came instantly. A dozen hands grasped their heads. The young hero released his hold and turned to the lady. She was sitting erect, white as marble, and as still.

"You are safe, madame," he said. "You had better alight and come in until these rampant brutes are pacified."

He stopped at the last word—thunder-struck. But the lady, with a wild cry, rose up and held out both her arms.

"Launcelot!" she cried; "Launcelot! Launcelot!"

"Catch her!" yelled a voice. "She's a-fainting."

He darted forward in time to prevent her falling. In a twinkling she was out of the carriage, clasped close in his arms.

"Out of my way!" he cried, in the voice of a stentor; and the mob cleared a passage for the hero of the hour.

He bore his burden up the steps and into the house.

Mrs. Lauriston, pale and startled, met them on the threshold.

"Have you saved her, Launcelot? Is she hurt? Who is it?"

"Look and see."

He laid her down upon a sofa.

"Fetch me cold water, mother, and sal volatile, and leave me to bring her to."

Mrs. Lauriston obeyed. She saw at a glance who it was,

and the instant the eyelids fluttered and lifted, she hastily retreated from the room.

"They will make it up," she thought. "Surely the hand of Fate is in this."

The blue eyes opened, and rested in that first glance upon the face they loved best on earth.

"Launcelot!" she cried. "Then it was not a dream. For the third time you have saved my life."

But he drew back from her—decidedly drew back—and stood regarding her with a cold, stern face.

"I have had that happiness, Miss Varneck. You are not in the least injured, I trust?"

She sat up, looking at him, with a pale, piteous face.

"I thought you were dead," she said, in a slow, bewildered sort of way. "Oh, Launcelot, my heart has been nearly broken! I thought you were dead."

"Indeed!"

Oh! the inflexible frigidity of that *indeed*!

"Then you have been misinformed, Miss Varneck. I am very much alive, as you may see. The human anatomy is a tougher affair than even I thought, since being jilted in cold blood does not kill. I can eat, drink—yes, and be merry occasionally—although I have been fooled in the past by a pretty face and siren smile. I can learn that Miss Eudora Varneck is shortly to become my Lady Annesley, and live."

"Spare me, Launcelot!" She covered her poor face with both hands to hide her falling tears. "You don't know what I have suffered."

"No? Then even prospective countesses do suffer. I thought it was only poor fools like myself, who madly staked their all on one throw and lost, who suffered. Mad dupes, you know, Miss Varneck, who presumed to lift their eyes to an heiress, and got properly snubbed for their pains. Why, you don't even know half the extent of my folly and presumption. I had the hardihood the other night—the night of the great ball—to steal like a thief around your stately home, at midnight, in the infatuated hope of catching one glimpse of you. And verily I had my reward; for, standing under the veranda, I saw you come out with Lord Annesley, and heard his tender declaration. Yes, Miss Varneck, I was mad enough, and besotted enough, and mean enough, to play the eavesdropper. I tell you, you see, that you may despise the plebeian doctor as he deserves."

She did not speak; she could not. She sunk down on the sofa, convulsive sobs her only answer.

The sight of her distress half maddened him, but still the frantic young lover ran on:

"And now, Miss Varneck, as this is in all likelihood the last time we will ever meet, permit me to offer my congratulations beforehand. May you be as happy as you deserve to be. A coronet and a title, no doubt, are the summit of earthly felicity. Their glory and splendor will keep out all thoughts of the infatuated idiot you have nearly driven mad. Farewell, Miss Varneck. I see his lordship approaching. I leave him to dry your tears and console you for your fright."

He turned to go. She started up.

"Launcelot—oh, Launcelot!" she cried.

But the fiery young madman was gone already, and Lord Annesley's voice sounded in the passage. A second later, and he and Valencia rushed into the room.

"Saved!" Miss Dandin cried. "Oh, my darling, thank God!"

Lord Annesley bent above her, white to the very lips.

"Can you forgive me for leaving you alone?" he said. "I can never forgive myself."

But she turned from them both with a bitter, heart-broken cry.

"Don't speak to me!" she burst out, wildly. "I feel as though I were going mad. Take me home—take me home!"

He drew her arm within his, and half led her out of the house.

Her tears had ceased; her face was deathly pale; her eyes wild and dilated.

"It is the fright," they both thought; "and the poor child is so hopelessly timid."

"I would like to see and thank the gentleman who saved your life," Lord Annesley said, hesitatingly. "If you will stop here one instant with Miss Dandin—"

But she interrupted him with a second cry. Her eyes turned upon him, wild and wide.

"You!" she said, in a voice of horror. "Not for ten thousand worlds! Take me home, my lord! oh, take me home!"

He placed her in the carriage without another word, took his seat beside her, and drove off. Valencia sat behind them. The ponies were quiet enough now. But all through the long drive not a word was spoken.

Endora sat with death-white face and burning eyes, looking straight into vacancy, like a creature distraught. Lord Annesley looked at her once or twice in mute consternation.

"Strange!" he thought. "Can her fright have turned her brain?"

It was nearly dark when they reached the house. Eudora ran up the steps in the same wild way, without waiting for either. In the entrance hall she encountered grandmamma.

"Where is papa?" she cried, breathlessly—"where is papa? I must see papa at once."

"My dear child—"

"Where is papa?" she exclaimed, shrilly. "Tell me, grandmamma. I must see him—I must tell him all!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOUR OF DOOM.

THE library door opened as she spoke, and Colonel Varneck looked out.

"Who calls?" he said. "You, Eudora? Come in!"

She ran in, in the same wild way, and closed the door. Grandmamma looked at the other two in mute inquiry.

"Her fright seems to have driven her wild," observed his lordship. "I am very sorry, madame, but your granddaughter has had a narrow escape for her life."

Madame uttered an ejaculation. Captain Dandin, entering at the instant, paused to listen. Valencia turned and went up to her room.

"We left her alone in the phaeton for a moment," his lordship explained, "while we entered a bookseller's—Miss Dandin and I. The ponies took fright all at once, and sped away like a couple of whirlwinds. What would have become of Eudora, Heaven knows, had not a young man headed the horses, and saved her nearly at the risk of his life. He took her into his house afterward and restored her to consciousness, for she very naturally had fainted. Since then she has been as you have just seen her—like a person out of herself."

"Who was the heroic young man who saved her?" asked grandmamma.

"His name is Lauriston—Doctor Lauriston. I regret I had no opportunity of seeing and thanking him."

There was a simultaneous exclamation from madame and the captain.

"*Mon Dieu!*" ejaculated the latter; "Launcelot again! And for the third time! Who says the finger of Destiny is not in this?"

"Do you really mean to say, Captain Dandin," madame

asked, eagerly, "that this is the same noble youth who twice before saved Eudora's life?"

"I do, madame. He and his mother, to my certain knowledge, are in Baltimore. I can understand Miss Varneck's agitation now. It is not the fright, my lord; it is the sight of this young man. It was he she saw in the garden on the night of the ball, and took for a ghost. She could not believe it was her old friend in the flesh, and she set it down at once as a spook."

"And what on earth," asked Mme. Varneck, "could bring this young man into the garden at midnight?"

Captain Dandin shrugged his shoulders.

"What makes fools of the wisest of men? Love! 'Love rules the court, the camp, the grove'—and so forth. This poor young doctor is madly in love with Miss Eudora, madame, and, unless I greatly mistake, she is quite as deeply in love with him. Your pardon, my lord! I see that look of haughty amaze. But what I state is an accomplished fact. You see, he is a hero—a handsome one. He has saved her life three times, at the risk of his own. Where is the female heart could withstand that? And then, Miss Varneck is a confirmed hero-worshiper."

Before either of his hearers could reply, the library door reopened and the colonel strode out.

"This is a most extraordinary affair!" he said. "Then the persons I am in search of are found. I am going to the city at once to see this Doctor Lauriston and his mother."

But Captain Dandin stepped forward and laid a heavy hand on the colonel's shoulder.

"One moment, my colonel," he said, calmly. "Extraordinary as what you have just heard may appear, I have something concerning those two persons still more extraordinary to relate. You must hear me before you see them. But I will fetch Mrs. Lauriston hither. Your pardon an instant."

He took out his pocket-book, scrawled a few lines in pencil, and handed it to the surprised officer.

"Read it, my colonel," he said; "then ask his lordship to do us all a favor. The ponies still stand yonder; they are not half blown. Let him drive to the city, give this scrawl to Mrs. Lauriston, and bring her back here."

Colonel Varneck read it in mute bewilderment. It read thus:

"DEAR MRS. LAURISTON,—I have astounding news for you—great news—glorious news! Don't faint. The husband of

your youth, lost for upward of twenty-one years, is found—is here! Come back with the bearer to Glen Gower. There he awaits you. Faithfully,

JULES DANDIN."

"What does this mean?" asked the mystified colonel.

"You shall learn. 'Thereby hangs a tale.' Will his lordship take the trouble to deliver this note? If not, we must dispatch a servant."

"I am quite ready," said Lord Annesley, "if to return to Baltimore and hand that note to Mrs. Lauriston is all you wish."

"And to bring her back. That is all. Go at once, my lord, and lose no time. For you, my colonel—and you, madame—if you will step into the drawing-room, you shall hear the extraordinary story I have to tell."

"Eleanor is in the drawing-room," interposed madame. "Had you not better select another apartment, Captain Dandin?"

"With your kind permission—no. It is absolutely necessary that the—the person of whom you speak should be present. Lead on, madame—we follow."

Madame obeyed. Captain Dandin was master of the situation, and spoke with a quiet dignity altogether new in their experience of him. She entered the drawing-room, and the gentlemen followed.

It was deeply dusk in the long apartment, but madame lighted the chandelier at once and flooded it with light.

By that sudden glow they beheld Gilbert Varneck's wife crouching on a sofa—literally crouching—her face hidden in her hands, her whole attitude one of most miserable, abject despair.

"Look up, Adelia Lyon!" exclaimed the captain, in ringing tones of command. "The hour of your downfall has come!"

She lifted up her face—her white, wretched face—and looked at them as a stag looks at its slayer with the knife at its throat.

"Look at her, Colonel Varneck!" Captain Dandin said, solemnly, pointing at the haggard creature—"look at that cowering, guilty wretch! Look at her well, and tell me if that is the innocent girl you wooed and wedded twenty-one years ago?"

"For God's sake, Dandin!" Colonel Varneck was just able to gasp—for madame, she was speechless—"what does this mean?"

"It means that the hour of that most miserable, most guilty woman's downfall has come! Wretch! murderess! I denounce you! Gilbert Varneck, she is no wife of yours—she never has been—since the wife you wooed and wedded long ago still lives!"

"In the name of Heaven, who, then, is she?" the colonel cried.

"The abandoned mistress of Gerald Rosslyn, and his murderess!"

The silence of death fell. Neither son nor mother could speak. They stood white with horror. Colonel Varneck staggered back a pace, a deadly feeling of sickness coming over him.

"Look in her face," pursued the merciless captain, "and see if I do not speak the truth. Is not her guilt and her shame plainly written there?"

Truly they were. She cowered before them, as stricken and miserable an object as ever the light shone on.

"From first to last she has duped you," said the accuser—"from first to last she has been false and treacherous to the core of her black, bad heart! The girl she has palmed off upon you for nearly nine years as your daughter is no child of yours. Her child still lives—the child of the man she foully murdered—the offspring of Gerald Rosslyn!"

Colonel Varneck sunk into a seat. He was livid to the very lips with horror.

"And my wife—my child?" he was barely able to gasp.

"Still live, and are well. It is Mrs. Lauriston and her son."

Another dead pause. The guilty woman, with one low wail of unutterable anguish and despair, covered her face again and cowered down.

"Let me tell my story consistently, if I can," said the captain, calmly. "Madame, pray be seated. You don't look fit to stand. My story, Colonel Varneck, carries me back to the year before you married Eleanor Lyon. You never knew she had a sister—a sister so like her that you could scarcely have told them apart—but so it was. You never knew it; for this sister had disgraced the family, and her name was dropped from among them. She had eloped with Gerald Rosslyn. She had lived with him for nearly three years when her child was born. It was the year after the birth of your son. You were away, out of the country. Gerald Rosslyn deserted her. She deserted her new-born infant, followed him, hunted him down, and shot him by his bride's side on his wedding-night.

I have told you the story before. I only concealed the name of his murderess. There she crouches now—Adelia Lyon! She escaped. She was a clever woman in her way, and she baffled justice. She became a servant—a seamstress—a governess. When you had been five years absent, your forsaken wife found out, by chance, her sister's address. She was lying ill in a city hospital at the time—given over for death. Her boy was in a charitable asylum. In that hour of her extremity she wrote her wicked sister a letter, telling her of her approaching end—of her poor forsaken little boy—begging her to be a mother to him when she was gone.

“She inclosed her marriage certificate, her ring, your letters, your pictures. She told Adelia all she knew of you. Adelia Lyon received that letter, but she never replied. She never exerted herself in the slightest degree to obey her dying sister. Her heart was harder than stone—harder than iron. She took it for granted her sister died, and the child was lost forever among the thousands of other orphan children, and she thought no more about them until your mother's advertisement, four years later, for her lost son's wife and child, appeared.

“That set her thinking—that set her plotting. I told you she was a clever woman. She set her clever wits at work, and concocted her plot. Her sister was dead—her child was lost. What was to hinder her, who resembled that dead sister so closely, from passing herself off upon your mother as your forsaken wife—her own brat as your child? How she carried out that plot you know. She came here with her little girl. You suddenly appeared upon the scene. Even you she duped to your face. She made you marry her. She was determined to have a legal right to her dignity. For over eight years she has carried out her deception. She has fooled you all to your faces!

“But I knew her from the first. I, in my turn, had duped her. Gerald Rosslyn was my friend. I went to the place where his infant daughter had been deserted at its birth by its most heartless mother, and I took it with me, for his sake, to Spain—adopted it as my own. I told the old woman in whose cottage I found it, if the mother ever came, to palm off some other child sufficiently alike to deceive her. I paid her well, and she obeyed.

“When, nine years after, Adelia Lyon came for her forsaken offspring, old Granny Croak gave her her own granddaughter, little Dora Dalton, and Adelia Lyon took her and knew no better.

“Colonel Varneck, the girl you think your daughter is Dora Dalton; her child is known to you as Valencia Dandin; and Launcelot Lauriston, the young doctor, is your lawful son.”

There was a long pause.

“Go on!” Colonel Varneck said, in a hollow, unnatural voice.

His mother could not speak. Adelia Lyon, cowering in her dumb despair, made no effort to stir.

“I came here with you, my colonel, nine years ago, and I saw yonder woman. I knew her at once. I had seen the sisters. I knew them apart. Besides, there was a birth-mark—three little black moles—on this sister’s left wrist, and not on your wife’s. I took hold of her arm—I saw those moles. We looked in each other’s eyes, and she saw that I knew her secret.

“From that minute she was completely in my power. The five thousand dollars she extorted from you she gave to me. The family diamonds, presented to her by your mother, she gave me, likewise, with her own hands. Every year since she has paid me a stipulated sum to keep her secret, and I have kept it. To-night I tell you all. A little later, and you would have found it out for yourself—a little late, and you would have ridden to Baltimore and beheld your wife and son. His paternity is written in his face. Your wife you could not fail to recognize instantly, or she you. I satisfy my revenge on that woman there, and tell you myself.

“And now to finish. By the merest chance, when I left here, nine years ago, I encountered your wife and son. I found them poor. I heard their story; I helped them. Eleanor Lauriston did not die in the hospital. She recovered; she reclaimed her son; she struggled with him for her daily bread. I took them to Silver Shore; I established her in business. I educated the boy; I made him a doctor. You know how he met the young lady you thought your daughter. Thrice he has saved her life. He loves her; she loves him.

“Mother and son are in Baltimore. In two or three hours she will be here—your wife, Gilbert Varneck, whom you have not seen for twenty years. There lies a murderess who shall meet her doom! My story is told.”

He finished abruptly, his face pale, his eyes gleaming with demoniac hate and triumph, and stood with folded arms.

Gilbert Varneck rose and strode over to the cowering creature.

"Is this true?" he hoarsely asked. "By the memory of all that has passed and gone, I conjure you to speak!"

She lifted her head. She fell down on her knees and kissed his feet.

"It is true. I am the guilty wretch he says! But, oh, my love, my love! I have worshiped you!"

"Rise!" he said, in the same hoarse voice, shrinking from her touch—"rise! go! I never want to look upon your face again. Oh, my God!" he passionately cried; "I never loved you! I always knew you were not my wife! Go—go! I can not breathe in the same room with you!"

She staggered to her feet and turned away without a word.

Oh! surely Captain Dandin's revenge was complete!

"Go to your room!" he said, with his satanic smile, "and remain there until you are wanted. No attempt to escape, mistress. Your door shall be watched."

She paused on the threshold.

"I will not try to escape," she said, in a dull, thick voice. "May I see my sister when she comes?"

"Yes; that the man you have deceived may behold for himself how you have duped him. Go!"

She went, without another word, straight to her room. Captain Dandin watched her enter, and heard her lock the door inside. He called to one of the house servants passing through the hall.

"Harry," he said, "stand before Mrs. Varneck's door, and remain there until I call you away. Do not let her come out."

The man obeyed, with a broad stare of wonder.

"She can not escape by the window," the captain thought, "without breaking her neck. She is quite safe for the present."

He re-entered the drawing-room. Mother and son still sat there in dumb horror—waiting.

"In two hours your wife will be here, Colonel Varneck," Captain Dandin said. "It is hard to wait, but we must wait till then."

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN DANDIN PAYS THE PENALTY.

MME. VARNECK turned her eyes full upon the captain for the first time, and spoke.

"You are a villain," she said, slowly—"as black and base

a villain as ever lived! What has been your object in all this?"

He bowed before her, his death's-head smile in full play.

"I have told you, madame. Gerald Rosslyn was my friend; on Gerald Rosslyn's murderess I swore revenge. And, madame, Dandin keeps his oath."

"You are a villain," madame repeated—"a double-dyed traitor and villain! My son was your friend, too; you pretended to be his. You broke his bread and drank of his cup, and for nine years you have shamefully deceived him. I tell you, Captain Dandin, the wretched creature you have hunted down is not half so base, half so despicable as you!"

Again he bowed.

"Madame is severe. I must endure her displeasure as best I may. Gold is sweet—the lady upstairs paid me well for keeping her secret. Revenge is sweeter—I have my revenge now. I must bear madame's censure as best I may."

"You shall bear something more than censure, presently," said Gilbert Varneck, sternly. "You shall answer for your share in compounding a felony. If she—your victim—suffers, by the living Lord of heaven, her accomplice shall not escape!"

The fallow face of the captain paled perceptibly, but still he wore his ghastly smile.

"I will run the risk; my share, at least, is no hanging matter. I think my punishment will be almost as easy to bear as yours, my lord of Glen Gower, with all your ancestral pride, when your name and story are bruited about in every penny journal the length and breadth of the land."

"Silence," thundered the colonel, "before I am tempted to strike you down at my feet! Dog—blood-hound! you are unworthy the name of man! Mother"—he turned to her suddenly—"leave the room and this scoundrel's presence; the air he breathes is polluted."

"Hard words, my colonel," said the captain, forcing a laugh; "but, as the children say, 'names will never hurt me.' I can survive your scorn, I dare say."

A look of unutterable contempt was Colonel Varneck's answer. He strode after his mother from the room.

"Endora is in the library," he said; "you go to her. The poor child is almost distracted. She came to me and fell at my feet, and sobbed and wept hysterically, and begged me to have her set free from her engagement with Lord Annesley. She loves this young man Launcelot Lauriston. He loves her. Three times he has saved her life. She thought he was dead when she consented to marry his lordship. Now that she

knows he is alive, she will die before she weds him. Her lover despises her, she says; she has no hope there—she only wants to be free, and break her heart in peace. Go to her, mother, and comfort her if you can.”

“I will go. Oh! Gilbert”—with a sudden, wild cry—“what is this fearful story we have just heard?”

“The truth, mother. I feel it; and she—that wretched woman—admits it. Heaven have mercy on her and upon us all! Go; I will await the coming of—of those others here.”

Madame hastened away to the library, and Colonel Varneck paced restlessly up and down the hall.

Eudora still lay as he had left her, her poor, pale face buried in the cushions, all wet with the rain of tears. She looked up piteously as madame appeared.

“Oh, grandmamma! have you seen him? What does he say?”

“Lord Annesley? Dear child, cease crying; all will be well. No one shall force my little girl against her wishes. His lordship will free you, of course; and this other—this young man you love so dearly—we will have him here. Now let me take you to your room. All will be well to-morrow.”

Eudora suffered herself to be led away. She was only a weak, impulsive child, and Mme. Varneck loved her too fondly to outgrow that love in an instant by the discovery she was not her grandchild. Come what might, she must always be fond of gentle little Eudora. She left her in her room, in charge of her maid, with strict injunctions to undress and go to bed.

“All will be well to-morrow, my pet,” she repeated, as she kissed her good-night and quitted the chamber.

Mme. Varneck turned to go down-stairs—was half-way down, when the sound of rapidly approaching wheels made her stop. Her son, in the hall below, made a step forward, then stood like a man spell-bound. An instant later, and the great front door was flung wide, and Lord Annesley strode in, followed by a woman.

“This way, madame,” he said. “Oh, Colonel Varneck, here is Mr. Lauriston!”

He stepped aside. Colonel Varneck never moved. He was whiter than the marble statues gleaming around him. The woman turned her eyes full upon him, and a shriek such as those who heard might never forget cleft the domed hall.

“Launcelot! Launcelot! Launcelot!” she cried; and with the words she fell forward upon his breast.

“Eleanor!” he said, in a choking voice—“my wife!”

And then husband and wife, separated for twenty long years, were clasped in each other's arms.

For the other two—Lord Annesley stood like a man petrified; Mme. Varneck, with a gasping cry, caught at the baluster for support. She saw before her a woman so like, yet so unlike, the woman upstairs that her head reeled. And husband and wife, clinging to each other as though earth and all it contained could never sunder them again, heeded the gazers no more than the stone statues around them.

Madame was the first to recover from the trance. Slowly she descended the stairs and stood before them. Lord Annesley turned his bewildered face to her.

"In Heaven's name, what does this mean?" he asked.

"You shall hear later, my lord. This lady is my son's wife. We have all been terribly deceived, Gilbert."

At the sound of his name Colonel Varneck looked up. Eleanor lifted her white, wild face, too.

"Who calls my husband Gilbert?" she said. "Launcelot, oh! is it a dream or a reality? Am I sane or mad? What does it all mean?"

Before any one could reply, the drawing-room door opened and the pale, sinister face of Captain Dandin looked out.

"So," he said, "you have come, Mrs. Lauriston? You have found your husband? Now, my colonel, which is the wife?"

"Captain Dandin," exclaimed Eleanor, "have you found me my husband? Oh, tell me how all this came about? I feel as though I were losing my senses."

And then, with a thrilling cry, she again caught and clasped the man she loved, clinging to him in a sudden paroxysm of wild weeping.

"Launcelot! Launcelot! my love, my husband! Oh, I must be mad! It can not be, after all these bitter, bitter years. It is a wild dream, from which I shall awake as I have awakened from so many others."

"It is no dream, my own dear wife," Gilbert Varneck answered, solemn and sad, his heart almost too full for words; "it is a blessed reality. My Eleanor and I will never part more until death divides us. Come in, and you shall hear all—the dark and shameful story this man has to tell."

He led her into the drawing-room. His mother followed. No one heeded the paralyzed Lord Annesley in this supreme hour.

"Tell your story, Dandin," the colonel said. "Tell my wife what you have told me."

He stood, with his protecting arm around her, stern and pale. She clung to him passionately, but her startled eyes turned upon the captain's face.

Captain Dandin repeated his story. Gilbert Varneck's wife listened in dead silence. When he had quite finished, she slowly spoke:

"And all these years you have deceived me; and, Captain Dandin, I thought you were my friend."

"He has deceived us all—basely deceived us!" her husband said. "He is the greatest villain unhung. Oh, my love, my love! to think that he should have stood between us all these weary years!"

She fell upon his breast, sobbing wildly.

"I thought you were dead, Launcelot—I never thought you guilty. I have never known one happy day since we parted last. And my sister—my most wicked sister, most cruel sister—oh! how could she—*how* could she do it?"

"She thought you were dead, Mrs. Lauriston—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Varneck," said the captain. "Let me do her that poor justice. She thought you were dead."

"She asked to see you," her husband said, bending lovingly over her. "It shall be as you please, my own dear wife."

"I can not see her!" Eleanor Varneck sobbed. "She has been too cruel—too base. I can not see her or forgive her yet."

"Then you are never likely to see her," said the captain, coolly, "since she leaves this house within the hour for a prison. But you will do as you please."

She turned upon him with flashing eyes.

"Wretch—traitor—coward! I will see her, then! I will forgive her! Send for her, Launcelot. Oh, my wretched, wretched sister!"

"I will fetch her," said Captain Dandin, wheeling round and quitting the room.

He ascended the stairs.

"You may go, Harry," he said to his black sentinel.

He tapped at the door, then turned the handle and looked in.

She had unlocked it at the sound of his voice, and stood before him, waiting. Ghastly pale she stood there, her haggard black eyes afire with a dull, deadly gleam.

It might have warned him—that dull fire, that ominous calm; but he was infatuated—doomed—not to be warned.

"My sister has come?" she asked.

How hollow and dull her voice sounded.

"She has come. She is with her husband. She will see you. Go to the drawing-room; I will follow."

She went without a word. She descended the stairs; she opened the door with a steady hand. She stood before them, livid as a galvanized corpse, but with a fixed, changeless, stony face.

Captain Dandin entered after her, and closed the door.

"Now, my colonel," he said, his irrepressible vindictiveness getting the better in spite of him—"now, madame, which is which?"

Clasped in each other's arms, they still stood—husband and wife.

The sisters confronted each other face to face. Ah! no need to look twice to know which was the true wife now.

"Adelia!"

Gilbert Varneck's wife spoke. She came out of the strong arms that held her, with a great cry, and approached.

But the guilty woman held out both hands to keep her off.

"Don't touch me," she said—"don't come near me. Gilbert Varneck's spotless wife must approach no polluted thing. Eleanor, I have wronged you beyond reparation. I don't ask for forgiveness, living or dead; my crime has been too great. But great as has been my guilt, your triumph is greater. I loved him—I love him still, better than ever you can love him. I have steeped my soul in blackest sin for his sake; I would do it again. But take him; he is yours. He loves you; me he never loved. I have seen you, and I wish no more. I will never look upon your face again. And now, Captain Dandin, a word with you."

She turned upon him, that dull, red gleam in her eyes, that ominous calm in voice and face.

"For nearly nine years you have been my tormentor—my tyrant. I have been your most abject slave. This is the hour of your supreme triumph, is it not—the hour for which you have hungered and thirsted and longed? All you have said of me is true; I have owned it. Even you can wish me no more miserable than I am. The hour of your victory has come. You have nobly avenged Gerald Rosslyn—now share Gerald Rosslyn's fate!"

Quick as lightning flashes she drew from her pocket a pistol. There was a flash—a report—a scream of human agony, and Captain Dandin fell, face forward, his blood and brains bespattering her dress.

CHAPTER XVI.

“THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH.”

It was three hours later. Up in his room, whither they had conveyed him, Captain Dandin lay dying.

The light burned low. By its dull, pale gleam his daughter knelt beside him. Colonel Varneck stood near, and a physician bent over him. His doom had been pronounced—ere another hour he would be numbered with the dead.

No tear fell, no sob sounded in that death-room. Valencia knelt, stonily still, white as the dying man. Mme. Varneck had told her all. She knew, at last, who her mother was—whom for so many years she had longed to see—the basest and most abandoned of her sex—a murderess—a double murderess.

Up in her chamber, that guilty mother crouched, her door carefully guarded. Until morning she might remain there. With the morning light she would leave the house she had desecrated, forever—for a life-long prison's cell.

Eudora knew all, too. Madame had gone to her in pity, and repeated Captain Dandin's story. She knew at last that never for one poor instant had she a right to the name she bore; she knew that Colonel Varneck was no parent of hers, nor the guilty woman her mother. She knew now who Mrs. Lauriston was, and the lover she had once rejected.

“What a wretch I have been!” she thought, with untold bitterness. “I refused him with scorn, upstart that I am, when he was the heir of Glen Gower all the while.”

She remained in her room by Mme. Varneck's command.

“You can do no good in the sick-chamber,” she said; “such horrors are not for you, child. Remain where you are.”

And then, pale and stern, madame glided back to the room of the dying man. Livid he lay, his life-blood pumping with every breath.

“If you would like to see a clergyman,” observed Dr. Brithwood, “there is no time to be lost. Your moments on earth are numbered.”

“A clergyman”—he repeated the words with a faint, derisive smile—“a clergyman for *me*? You don't know what you are talking of, my friend.”

He turned suddenly to Colonel Varneck, a fierce light leaping into his dull eyes.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"In her own room."

"Don't let her escape—mind, I charge you. She shall hang like a dog for this. Curse her! she said I had reason to fear her, but I would not be warned. But from my grave I will pursue her—in my coffin I will hunt her down! Fairy"—he grasped the girl's hand suddenly—"remember your dying father's injunction—hunt that murderess to her doom!"

"Captain Dandin," said Colonel Varneck, "what is it you mean? On your own showing, you are no father of hers."

Again that derisive smile played about the ghastly lips.

"That is my last secret, colonel. I am her father; I have deceived you all. I am not Captain Dandin; I am Gerald Rosslyn."

"Gerald Rosslyn? A dead man?"

"Soon to be, *mon colonel*—not yet. That was part of my vengeance. She thought I was dead—thought herself a murderess. Well, she was; but only in desire—only in intention. The shot she fired at Gerald Rosslyn on his wedding-night struck him down—disfigured him for life—made him the hideous object you see—but did not kill him outright. Better for her it had. I rose from that sick-bed a disgusting object of ugliness, scorned by the bride who had loved me only for my good looks, cast off by her friends. Then it was I swore my vengeance. I took my child and went to Spain. I came back only to hunt the tigress down. For nine long years I have made her life a misery to her—a torture—a living death. Why"—the derisive smile appeared once more—"I even played ghost for her benefit. A wax mask, cleverly made after a picture taken in early youth, enabled me to frighten her into spasms two or three times. She thought it Gerald Rosslyn's ghost. No, my colonel—learn the whole truth at last. I am Gerald Rosslyn, whose life Adelia Lyon has twice attempted—has this time taken—and who shall pay the full penalty of her crime. My Fairy"—he grasped her wrist in his icy hand—"are you listening? Will you heed—will you obey me?"

"I will."

"Then swear to pursue that woman to the scaffold—swear to deliver her up to justice—swear to hunt her as I have hunted her down."

"Man, man!" cried the colonel, in horror, "remember you are dying—remember she is her mother."

"I remember. Swear, my daughter."

"I swear!"

The words dropped from her white lips. Her great, dark eyes were dilated in unutterable horror.

"That is my own Fairy. All I possess in the world I have left to you. My will, my valuables, my money, are all in yonder drawer. Here is the key. Watch by my side, Fairy, until the last; then send for the officers of justice and deliver that woman up."

"I will." And then an awful silence fell.

* * * * *

The midnight hour struck.

Up in her own room, this last night, the guilty woman cowered, her face hidden, a dull, painless apathy numbing every sense.

She scarcely suffered—the anguish and the remorse had alike passed. Nothing remained but to face her inevitable doom.

She looked up, listening dully, as a loud-voiced clock struck the solemn hour.

"The last I shall ever hear," she thought. "The new day I shall never see has dawned on the world."

And then her thoughts drifted away—drifted strangely into the past. The pretty room, with all its bright luxuries, faded away. A wild forest scene arose before her. Again it was midnight—a black and wrathful midnight—a wild gale sighing through the trees, a storm-rack of clouds scudding over the sky. Again she stood at the lonely forest junction, with Gerald Rosslyn by her side, waiting for the stage to pass. Again that fierce storm broke; again they were overthrown; again she saw the rude New Jersey farm-house where her child was born, where the lover of her youth deserted her, where her heart turned to iron.

"If he had only been true—if I had only been his wife, how different it all might have been!" she thought, drearily. "I don't think I was always base; but that man drove me mad. Have I ever been sane since? Have I been a mad woman all these years without knowing it? What a shameful record it is that lies behind me, and how soon it will all end now!"

There was a tap at the window; a stone came crashing through the glass. She picked it up. A written paper in-folded it, written in Gilbert Varneck's hand:

"He is dead. The officers of justice will soon be here. Your window is unguarded. A ladder is beneath. There is yet time. Fly!"

She read it over, a strange, slow smile creeping over her face.

“He is very good,” she said, “to think of me—very good. Oh, my love! will she—your wife—ever love you as I have done? Fly? Yes, I will fly. The neck your dear arm has encircled will never be profaned by the hangman’s rope. But if I could only see you once, first!”

She went to the window, drew aside the curtain, and looked out.

No, he was not to be seen. The ladder of ropes stood under her casement, but he was gone.

“Not even this,” she said—“not even this. Then, my dear love, farewell—farewell forever!”

She looked up at the purple midnight sky, all brilliant with summer stars. The moon sailed high; the silvery sea lay asleep beneath. All the earth was beauty and peace. One look, and she dropped the curtain and turned slowly away.

From the breast of her dress she drew forth a bottle labeled “Laudanum—Poison.” With a steady hand she lifted a glass and emptied into it the dark-red liquid; with a steady hand she raised it to her lips and drained it to the dregs. She laid bottle and glass back upon the table, crossed the room, and lay down upon the bed.

* * * * *

Day was brightly breaking—a radiant September morning—when the constables, for whom Valencia had sent, reached the house. She arose from beside the ghastly corpse, still and stern and tearless, at their approach.

“This way,” she said; “your prisoner is here. I accuse Adelia Lyon of the willful murder of my father, Gerald Rosslyn!”

She led the way—the constables followed—up to the room of the murderess. It was not even locked; a guard sat without.

They entered. The night-lamp still burned; the rosy dawn stole brightly in. The room was very still. Adelia Lyon lay upon the bed, her face turned to the wall.

“Arise!” Valencia said, in a high, clear voice. “Murderess, awake!”

But she never stirred.

One of the constables laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

“I arrest you, ma’am, in the name of the law, for willful murder. Come, get up!”

But she never moved.

Valencia bent suddenly over her, recoiled, and turned upon them with a ghastly face.

"Too late," she said. "She has escaped. She is dead!"

They turned her over, and saw it was true. She lay before them, out of their reach, stark and cold as her victim.

"Look here," said the second constable, holding up the vial and glass. "This has done the job. She ought to have been searched."

They moved to quit the room. Valencia made a step after them, staggered blindly, and fell to the ground like a stone.

CHAPTER XVII.

VALENCIA'S FLIGHT.

It was all over—the last ghastly rites. Under the sod murderess and victim lay in the nearest burial-ground. Gerald Rosslyn and Adelia Lyon, after "life's fitful fever," slept beneath the clay.

They were back at the house—the silent house of mourning, darkened by the shadow of an awful crime. Like ghosts they moved about, pallid and awe-struck, speaking only in whispers—hushing their footfalls, bating their breath, their hearts turning cold within them at thought of the awful tragedy past and gone.

In the room that was hers, Valencia Dandin sat, looking out with dry, tearless eyes at the fading light. The white, cold face was rigid as marble; only life burned intensely in those wild, dark eyes. No tear had fallen, no sob had been heard. She had sat frozen in that tearless calm from first to last. She had not spoken to a soul in the house since she had looked upon her mother's dead face. Her corpse-like face frightened them. They left her alone with her dead, afraid to disturb her—afraid to drive her mad.

And now it was all over, and what remained? She sat by the window, watching the low light dying out of the western sky, and thought, with a dull aching at her heart, of what must come next. The roof that had been desecrated by her mother and father could shelter her no longer. They were very, very kind to her. She felt their kindness to the core of her heart, but she saw her own desolate path clear and plain. If she only dared to do as that wicked mother had done—end her life's long misery with her own hand. She shuddered as the horrible temptation filled her soul.

"No, no, no!" she thought. "Keep me, oh! great God,

from that last unpardonable crime. Help me to the bitter end, and, in Thy mercy, let that end come soon!"

The sun dropped out of sight behind the misty Maryland hills—the last rosy glimmer of the dying day faded away. Moon and stars rose up in their silver beauty, and the whip-poor-will and katydid chanted their plaintive vesper lay. The lonely orphan sat, and looked, and listened, an untold night of despair looking out of the great, melancholy, dark eyes.

"For the last time," she thought, "the last time!"

There was a soft rap at the door. She crossed and opened it, and saw the kind, commiserating face of good old Mme. Varneck.

"My poor, pale girl!" the old lady said, very tenderly, "this will never do. Come down, Valencia; it is the wish of all; come down and join us. Try and forget your troubles, my poor child!"

The mournful dark eyes softened. She lifted the old hand and kissed it.

"You are all too kind, too good. But, dear Madame Varneck, give me this one evening to myself. Believe me, I will never forget all your great goodness while my life lasts."

"It must be as you say, my dear. Then to-morrow you will join us once more?"

"To-morrow," she repeated, mournfully. "Yes, give me until to-morrow. How is Eudora?"

"Very poorly—unable to leave her bed. Dear child, those cruel shocks are not good for her; but she will be well and happy soon. You know that brave boy, her lover—my grandson—is here, wild to see her once more. And this is something for *you*."

She gave her a little twisted note, with a flash of her keen old eye that said, "I know all." But the girl took it with an unmoved face.

"Until to-morrow," she said, softly, "dear Madame Varneck, farewell!"

Again Valencia kissed the wrinkled hand. Then she was alone—the door shut. She locked it this time, walked back to the window, opened the note with a steady hand, and by the last fading ray read its few words:

"MY OWN DEAR LOVE,—Come to me, my love, my bride, my wife! Come, and never leave me again. You know how I have always loved you—in your loneliness and sorrow I love you ten thousand times more than ever. Once again I am

free. Forgive the past, my own peerless love, and come home to the heart that beats only for you. ANNESLEY."

She read it slowly and steadily to the end. Then, while the silver moon sailed up, and its glory fell upon her like a benediction, she laid her poor pale face on her arm, and lay as if she never cared to lift it again.

And the slow hours passed—the summer night wore on. She looked up at last; it was eleven by her watch. She rose, drew the curtain, lighted her lamp, brought forth paper and ink, and sat down by the table to write.

The first was a few lines to Mme. Varneck. It ran:

"DEAR FRIEND,—Pardon me; I shall be far away when you see this. Do not follow; I will never return. Your kindness will brighten my life till its close, but under this roof I can never set foot more. Kiss my darling Eudora for me. Tell her to be happy with her brave young lover, and forget
"VALENCIA."

She folded, directed, and sealed it with a hand that never faltered, with an eye that never moistened. Her despair was far beyond tears.

She took a second sheet and wrote again:

"MY DEAR LORD,—If I had never loved you before, I should have loved you for the noble words you have sent me in my misery and despair. Until this poor heart ceases to beat, they will lie above it; until they shut me in my coffin, the memory of your love will sweeten and bless my lonely life. But I would indeed be base and unworthy were I to accept such a sacrifice.

"No, my lord. My love, my prayers are yours—never my wretched, degraded self. Very soon you will be happy with some one worthy of you. May that day come soon, and may the good God bless you both! Don't follow me—don't hunt me down! Leave me alone to fight the battle of life. The Father of the fatherless will protect and keep me; and one day, my love! my love! we may meet in heaven.

"Farewell, my lord, and forever!

"VALENCIA."

Still no tear—still no cry. Heavy as lead lay the heart in her bosom, but fixed as fate itself was her purpose.

She sealed this note, rose, took from her trunk a brass-

bound box, the key in the lock, wrapped it in paper, and addressed it to Mme. Varneck.

Within that box lay the ancestral diamonds, not a stone missing.

It was past eleven now; the house was still as the grave. All had retired, worn out with long vigils and dismal watches. In the sick-chamber, where poor Eudora lay, tossing in a low fever, and in the long, silent corridors, night-lamps burned. All the rest of the household were asleep.

She took her bonnet and mantle and put them on. Her earthly belongings were all contained in one little black bag, packed and locked. As her watch pointed to twelve, she softly unlocked her door, passed out, listened a second, and flitted on.

Only once she stopped on her steady way out—once at Lord Annesley's door. She knelt down and kissed the threshold.

"My love! my love!" she whispered.

A moment later and she was out under the shining stars—an outcast and a wanderer—wrecked in the world!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DAWN OF PEACE.

THE last day of September. Pale as a shadow, wan and weak, Eudora sat looking out at the sunny prospect of swelling meadow and dark forest, once all her own.

Very sad looked the sweet blue eyes, wasted and worn the little hands lying idly on her lap. It was her first day up, and she lay among her pillows, white as the snowy linen.

A low, nervous fever had prostrated her for weeks. She had tossed in delirium; she had babbled pitifully of the lover she had lost.

"Come back, Launcelot!" had been her cry. "Oh, come back—come back, and try and forgive me!"

Mme. Varneck rarely left her by night or day. The tenderest nursing, the most devoted love was hers, and the first sight that met her eyes, when reason returned, was the sweet, beautiful face of Launcelot's mother.

"Mrs. Lauriston," she said, feebly, "*you* watching me?"

"Mrs. Lauriston" bent and kissed her.

"Not that name now, my love. I am, as you are going to be—Mrs. Varneck."

Eudora hardly understood her. She covered her face and turned away. She dared not ask for Launcelot; she was unworthy.

She never spoke again while Eleanor Varneck remained in the room. She turned to the wall and lay very, very still, her heart too full for words. She heard Colonel Varneck enter and bend above his wife.

"How is our little girl now, Eleanor?"

How full of love his voice was! She had never heard him speak like that in all the days gone by. And the low, tender voice of Eleanor answered:

"Better, I think. She knew me a moment ago. She has fallen asleep again, so I may leave her."

They quitted the room together—those married lovers—trebly dear to each other from their long separation.

Still Eudora lay there and never stirred.

"Oh, why am I getting better?" she thought, bitterly.

"Why have I not died and made an end of it all?"

Presently grandmamma entered, and stooping, kissed the pale cheek. And then the mournful blue eyes opened. Eudora could never be afraid of her.

"My dear little girl! And I thought you were asleep! Grandmamma is so glad to see her pet almost well once more."

"Oh, grandmamma!" with a sad, sad cry, "why did you nurse me back to health—to life-long sorrow? Why did you not let me die?"

"Because we have no idea of losing our bright little household treasure; because we could not get along without our precious Eudora. Hurry and get well, my pet, and never mind talking of 'life-long sorrow' and such nonsense. I long to see my sunbeam dancing about the dull old house once more."

Eudora sighed heavily, and there was a silence. Then:

"Where is Valencia?" she asked.

"My dear," madame said, regretfully, "Valencia has gone. We don't know where, and we can not find her. She left a note for me and one for Lord Annesley, and she fled in the night. She bid us not pursue her, but search has been made in every direction, and all in vain. She has disappeared. She left, too, the family diamonds—poor child!"

"And Lord Annesley?" Eudora said, falteringly.

"Lord Annesley is in search of her. He will never rest, he says, until he finds her. He loves her, and she him, and to think I never suspected it! She has behaved nobly, generously, poor girl! From first to last she has been 'more sinned against than sinning.'"

Eudora's ready tears fell fast—she had loved this regal Spanish girl so well.

“Did she leave no message for me, grandmamma?”

“She left her love and her best wishes for your happiness, with—well, never mind whom! Don’t let us talk of this sad subject any longer. Lord Annesley will find her, no doubt, and cure all her despair. One may hope so much for a young person of nineteen. And as for you, my dear, the sooner you get better and sit up, the better we will all like it.”

Eudora rallied fast. A week after she was able to sit in her arm-chair, and watch the brown October sunshine filling the world with glory. Grandmamma, the colonel and his wife were all that was kind, and tender, and good. But the memory of some one else, whose name was never mentioned, weighed down her heart with sorrow and shame.

“They never speak of him, and I know he is here,” she thought, mournfully. “I have heard his voice and his step in the passage many a time of late. He hates and despises me too much even to ask how I am. I must run away, like Valencia, and hide myself from him forever.”

A rap at the door. Grandmamma, no doubt.

“Come in,” Eudora said, without turning her tear-wet face around.

The door opened, some one came in, shut it, and stood still.

“Eudora!” said a voice.

Had she been dying, that dear voice would have recalled her to life. She started to her feet with a low, thrilling cry, and saw him standing before her—her hero, her lover, her glorious young Saxon King Olaf, with the blue eyes and golden hair.

“Eudora!”

She made a step toward him, both hands outstretched, then stood still. He could restrain himself no longer. They had told him to be very calm—those cold-blooded people outside—not to excite her, and so on, but who was to withstand all that trembling, fragile innocence?

With two strides he had her in his strong arms, crushing her poor weak life out, covering her face with kisses, and protesting passionately between:

“Forgive me, Eudora, my own heart’s darling! I have been a brute—a monster! and you—oh, my dear little love! to think that you should have been sick and suffering here, and they should have kept me out so long!”

She lay very still—in a trance of unutterable joy. Once she whispered:

“Then you forgive me, Launcelot? You love me still?”

Launcelot’s answer was not in words, but it was eminently

satisfactory and to the point. And Eudora's last sad tear was shed; for if she ever wept again, it must be on his breast, and there even tears were bliss.

* * * * *

The close of a sleety November day. The shrill wind whistled up and down the dull London street, and drove the frozen snow before it in whirling clouds. A drear, dark, wintery twilight, an evening for bright fires, and glowing lamps, and happy fireside circles.

A young girl stood by the window of an imposing-looking mansion, gazing out at this leaden twilight. The mansion was a young ladies' seminary, and the young girl a teacher of music and Spanish—a tall and stately girl, with a darkly beautiful face, colorless as marble, and grave with a gravity far beyond her years. Very sad was the light in those fathomless dark eyes—very deep the lines of pain and trouble about that sweet, patient mouth. She wore deepest mourning, but the crape and bombazine without was only a sign of the deeper sorrow of the heart.

A servant entered and lighted the gas.

"There's a visitor for you, Miss Ross," she said, briskly—"a gentleman. Will you go down to the drawing-room, or shall I show him up here?"

"A visitor for me!" Miss Ross repeated, in surprise—"a gentleman? Are you sure there is no mistake, Maria?"

"Quite sure, miss. He asked for Miss Ross as plain as plain. It's Miss Constance Trevanna's uncle. I have seen him here before."

"Ah! on school business, no doubt. Very well, Maria; I will go down."

She quitted the parlor and descended to the drawing-room. A gentleman, sitting in the full blaze of the gas-light, arose upon her entrance. As her eyes fell upon him, she recoiled with a low, wild cry.

"At last!" the gentleman said, in a deep voice, "after three weary, endless years. At last, Valencia!"

He made a step toward her, but she put out both hands to keep him off.

"And I thought I was safe here—I thought I might forget the past—I thought I might find peace! And you come and undo it all. My lord—my lord! you are very cruel!"

"Yes," said Lord Annesley, coming nearer; "if to love you with a deathless love be cruel, then I am. Valencia, I have searched the world over for you. Since that most mis-

erable night, three years ago, I have never known rest. I have been on the wing early and late—over the world for you, and all in vain. Valencia, it is you who are cruel, not I!”

“How did you find me now?” she asked, looking at him. “I thought I was safe here.”

“By the merest chance. I returned to England after my fruitless search, in despair, and Constance Trevanna, one of your pupils, found me my treasure. She was raving of her Spanish teacher—so beautiful, so mysterious, so sad! There could not be two in the world so alike. I came here to-night on the chance of finding you, as the drowning catch at straws, and—I *have* found you; and, Valencia, I will never lose you again.”

“My lord—my lord! what are you saying? Have you forgotten the past? Oh, why did you not leave me to the peace these three dreary years have brought? Why recall the tragical days gone forever? Why did you seek me out to-night and undo it all?”

“Because I love you, Valencia, with a love that can only end when they lay me in my coffin; because I have been a lonely, wretched, aimless wanderer since I lost you; because life without you is not worth the having. Oh, my love—my love! don’t be cruel—don’t send me away again!”

His arms clasped her—her head fell on his breast with a great sob. Life was so dreary, and she loved him so dearly—so dearly!

“Do not tempt me, my lord,” she said, in a choking voice. “I am very weak and wretched; but I must not listen to your pleading. I can not drag you down to my degraded level. The memory of your love and devotion is brightness enough for all my future life. Oh, my lord! don’t make me false to myself and to you. Leave me now while I have strength to bid you go!”

“I will never leave you,” he said, drawing her closer, “until I have your promise to be my wife. I will wait just one month for that blissful time—not an hour longer. The world is wide. Together we can be happy; apart there can be nothing but misery for either of us. Valencia, my heart’s darling, let me hear you say once what those sweet lips have never said yet, ‘I love you!’”

Her arms encircled his neck—the sweet, beautiful lips met his in a long, passionate kiss.

“I love you, Clarence, with all my heart—as I have loved you since I saw you first!”

It was half an hour later. Valencia looked up from her silent trance of joy with a bright, shy smile.

* * * * *

“And now, Clarence, tell me about our friends in far-off Maryland. How has it been with them for the past three years?”

“Well. Perfect peace, perfect earthly joy, reign at Glen Gower. The colonel and his wife are a model of married lovers; and Launcelot and Eudora, of course, are at the summit of human bliss.”

“They are married, of course?”

“Of course—married over two years; and there is a young lady who adds to their felicity—a Miss Eleanor Lauriston Varneck—who made her appearance some twelve months since, and is, as usual, a perfect paragon of all babies. I have her picture somewhere, and a rapturous description of her transcendent charms from papa. Our wedding-tour, Valencia, shall be to Maryland, to see this wonderful little Heiress of Glen Gower.”

THE END.

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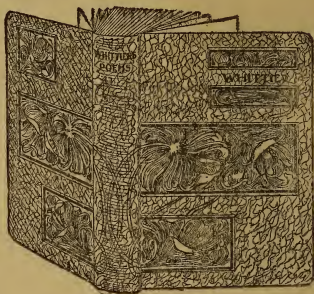
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